TRAVELLER®

WHISPERS ON THE ABYSS

SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER®

WHISPERS ON THE ABYSS

CREDITS

CLASSIC TRAVELLER

Marc Miller

MONGOOSE TRAVELLER

AUTHOR
Martin J. Dougherty

EDITOR
Matthew Sprange

LAYOUT AND GRAPHIC DESIGN
Sandrine Thirache

ILLUSTRATIONS
Quentin Soubrouillard (interior illustrations and cover), Shane Watson, Gary Trow, Sergio Villa

PROOFING
Charlotte Law

TRAVELLER INNER CIRCLE

Andrew James, Alan Welty, Colin Dunn, M. J. Dougherty, Rob Eaglestone, Sam Wissa, Joshua Bell, Maksim Smelchak, Geir Lanesskog, Christopher Griffen

MONGOOSE PUBLISHING

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 02
THE MISSION 07
REFEREE'S INFORMATION 11
THE R2A4 PROTOTYPE 14
AUTOCREW 20
RHYLANOR SUBSECTOR 23
LANTH SUBSECTOR 26
VILIS SUBSECTOR 28
SETTING UP THE CAMPAIGN 32
RHYLANOR 35
THE GREAT GATES OF RHYLANOR 38
JAE TELLONA 42
CORSAIRS AND COMPETITORS 43
FULACIN 53
RESCUE AT FULACIN 54
THE SPINWARD MAIN 70
DINOM 72
THE BRIGHT FACE 73
ACROSS THE BORDER 95
ARDEN 99
ESCAPE FROM ARDEN 100
EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONRY & ATTIRE 105
- RVSC VACC SUITS 105
- RVSC ISSUE WEAPONS 107
- SUPPORT WEAPONS 109
- OTHER WEAPONS 111
- EMERGENCY VACUUM PROTECTION EQUIPMENT 112

STARSHIPS 113
- ARGACAN MULTIPURPOSE VESSEL 114
- IMPROVED KINUNIR PATROL DESTROYER 117

LIBRARY DATA 125
AFTERWORD 126

Traveller ©2024 Mongoose Publishing. All rights reserved. Reproduction of this work by any means without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden. All significant characters, names, places, items, art and text herein are copyrighted by Mongoose Publishing.

This game product contains no Open Game Content. No portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without written permission. To learn more about the Open Game License, please go to www.mongoosepublishing.com.

This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United Kingdom and of the United States. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organisations, places or events is purely coincidental.

TRAVELLER is a registered trademark of Mongoose Publishing Ltd.

Printed in China.

INTRODUCTION

Whispers on the Abyss is a mini-campaign for *Traveller*, set in the region around the Abyss Rift within the Lanth subsector of the Spinward Marches. The Travellers are tasked with a potentially lucrative mission – to showcase a new starship variant to potential clients in the Rhylanor, Lanth and Vilis subsectors. Their voyage will take them to both iconic and obscure destinations, and along the way they will come to realise that something is stirring in the Abyss region.

This mini-campaign is intended for any group of Travellers. They will not need a starship as one is provided for their mission. No particular skillset is required, although the ability to operate a starship will be useful. Diplomatic and 'people' skills will also be an advantage, as will status or reputation in a merchant, naval or political field. Travellers of almost any background or political inclination can play this mini-campaign but ideally they will have no strong affiliation as this may make some of the choices to be made more interesting.

Long-time *Traveller* fans may recognise some elements they encounter along the way. Rumours or events may remind them of classic adventures – a worker's revolt on Dinom, a crashed Kinunir cruiser and wild stories of lost treasure ships somewhere in the Abyss Rift. Some of these are just rumours of far-off places; others are hard reality. This does not mean these veteran Travellers will know all there is to know about these events. The story unfolding around them is here and now, not there and then.

Whispers on the Abyss is set in the early days of the year 1107.

INVOLVING THE TRAVELLERS

Whispers on the Abyss begins at Rhylanor starport. If the Referee wants to build in a job offer to an existing campaign, this could take place anywhere in the region, although the default opening of the mini-campaign assumes the Travellers have already agreed to undertake the mission. There are several reasons why they might have done this, as discussed under Traveller Motivations on page 3. It is not necessary for the Travellers to all have the same motivations; indeed, it might be interesting for them to have cross-cutting agendas. Their backgrounds will give them different advantages and perspectives that might be useful to the group as a whole, assuming they decide their loyalty to one another outweighs other affiliations.

If *Whispers on the Abyss* is to be played with new Travellers, the contract with the Reidd-Valaasii Starship Corporation (RVSC) can be their meeting point if they come from very different backgrounds. There is no reason why one or more of the Travellers might not have secret motivations as discussed further on, or some of their Contacts and Allies might be worked into the campaign's backstory.

The campaign assumes the Travellers were selected for the mission by RVSC. Depending on their background they might have been headhunted as experts, applied and got lucky, blagged their way in or used a favour, or perhaps ended up on the mission by some unusual circumstance. The Travellers can decide for themselves, providing their answer is something plausible, or the Referee can determine their entry point based on their skills and background.

However they came to be involved, the Travellers are part of a crew and attached personnel assigned to showcase a sample of the new Type R2A4 fast trader, an upgraded version of the ubiquitous Type R subsidised merchant. Some of the Travellers may be crew, some experts in their field, and some may be along because of their sales or diplomatic skills. Sufficiently eminent people might just be there to lend gravitas to the proceedings.

Any Traveller can contribute to the mission in their own way. For crew, it is obvious – they are expected to make the ship look good and not prang it against the docking bay wall. Experts can answer queries or just baffle the questioner with impenetrable jargon. An Imperial noble or decorated war hero raises the status of the group just by being there. Someone else might contribute by being distractingly attractive or laying down a blistering guitar solo whilst standing atop the ship's dorsal bulge. How the Travellers will go about the mission is up to the Travellers, based on their skills, their imagination and their chutzpah.

REFEREE'S NOTES

The Travellers have a great deal of agency in *Whispers on the Abyss*, as is appropriate. This does mean they may wander off the expected path from time-to-time. You might be tempted to railroad the Travellers from one decision to the next and to make sure they make a decision the way that the campaign expects them to. That, however, is completely contrary to the ethos of this campaign and *Traveller* in general. The Travellers are captains of their own fate and will bear the consequences of their decisions.

There is some structure to the campaign as a result of the Travellers' mission and the presence of personnel working for their patron. These characters will make suggestions or protest actions they do not agree with and will report criminality or actions that are not in the best interests of the patron. The Travellers will have to deal with this in whatever way they see fit.

There are several situations the Travellers could simply ignore. They may shrug and fly off, deciding not to investigate the downed starship or get involved in the revolution on Dinom. There are reasons why they might or indeed should get involved, including the possibility of reward from a patron that gains influence as a result of their actions. The Travellers might simply feel the call to adventure, or may be smart enough to realise any situation can be turned to their advantage.

However, some Travellers may have been conditioned by electronic adventure games into a simplistic 'quest giver says do this, do it, collect reward' mentality. Human-moderated roleplaying games offer so much more than this but Travellers may need to be reminded. For example, the Travellers might see a newsvid about an incident with themselves front and centre. They may find their meal is on the house because the restaurant is honoured to host such heroes… and can benefit from the publicity. They may also discover that by getting involved with events they can make their mark on the cosmos.

Whispers on the Abyss offers the Travellers the chance to witness or take part in great events that are beginning to unfold. If the Travellers' actions matter in the universe, they are more likely to get involved and start caring about what happens. Years after the campaign is over, the Travellers might recall how they unknowingly took part in the opening actions of a major conflict. They might even find themselves wondering if they started it! This is the great reward waiting for Travellers; the chance to shape the future.

The converse is also true. Travellers who will not do anything unless someone waves a bag of Credits will miss out on the chance to be part of great events. They have complete agency and can choose to sit on the side-lines or hold out for the biggest mission reward if they want to. If the Travellers take that approach, so be it. The events outlined in this volume will take place without them and the Referee can always reuse incidents at another time in the campaign. Travellers who do not get involved will not be able to influence the course of history.

How the Referee approaches this is a matter of personal choice. Railroading may be acceptable, as can offering big wads of cash. However, a Referee who explicitly or by demonstration shows the Travellers that their actions make a difference and that the universe will not wait for them if they do not act, can draw them into an experience that will be memorable for everyone. The loot drops and the mission-end pay-outs are all very well in-game but the experience of having played that game is what keeps bringing Travellers back to roleplaying with others around the tabletop.

TRAVELLER MOTIVATIONS

The Travellers' motivations link to their degree of accountability on the mission and the type of reward they can expect to receive.

RVSC EMPLOYEE

The Traveller was already working for RVSC when the mission was conceived. They may have responded to a call for volunteers or been ordered to take part. Either way, they are accountable to the firm and expected to hold others accountable too. It would be expected that employees would be loyal to the company and keen to safeguard its interests in the hope of receiving promotion and similar rewards. However, an employee might be disgruntled and seek a way to pay back the company for some mistreatment or slight, or to get enough cash for an early retirement. That cash might come from the company – legitimately or not – or from some outside agency. Such an employee might be able to play everyone off against one another, although they would need to make enough money to disappear afterward.

Employee Motivations and Agendas

Agenda	Notes
Just doing my job	The employee has no particular goals other than to do the job and be duly rewarded. They will generally act in the company's best interests because it is expected of them and the best way to get that big bonus.
Corporate ladder	The employee intends to use this mission to further their career, whether honestly or not. They are eager to be seen acting in the best interests of the company but may engineer circumstances or report incidents in a manner intended to enhance their status.
Turncoat	The employee is unhappy with the company and wants it – or perhaps some specific people within it – to lose status and money. The employee may have already agreed to leak secrets or sabotage the mission and if not they will be inclined to do so if an opportunity arises.
I want out	The employee wants to escape from their contract and retire or move on to a better life. Successfully completing the mission might be one way to do that but if an opportunity comes along that seems better, the employee may well take it.

FREELANCE EXPERT

The Traveller is a freelancer in their field, sought out and hired by the firm for this one mission. These might be crewmembers but experts in related fields and skilled lawyers, administrators and diplomats are all desirable. The freelancer motivation is a good cover for a plant serving the interests of some political or commercial concern.

Expert Motivations and Agendas

Agenda	Notes
I want a job	The expert is hoping to be hired on a permanent basis or get a lucrative consulting contract with the firm. Successful completion of the mission is important to this but so is being seen to be of value.
I just want the fee	The expert is doing a job for payment. They will be concerned with maintaining their professional reputation more than protecting the interests of RVSC, although often the two go hand in hand.
I need to prove myself	The expert needs to demonstrate their competence, either to remedy some setback they have recently suffered or to convince an organisation they are worthy of an award, membership or reinstatement.
Cover	The expert is using the mission as a cover for something else. They may be a Fake, a Plant or both.

NOTABLE FIGURE

A Traveller with a noble title or impressive rank and military decorations would be an asset, as might someone whose fame comes from a less formal source. Notables need to be 'wholesome' to be useful to the mission – a notorious criminal or highly controversial figure is not an asset to a company attempting to establish its reliability and trustworthiness.

Notable Motivations and Agendas

Agenda	Notes
I was bored	The notable figure took the job for lack of anything better to do. They might want to travel a bit at someone else's expense or get away from previous commitments. Either way, the notable is not really committed to the mission and has little at stake in it. They may or may not put in much effort.
This is important	The notable took the job because they thought it was worth doing. This may be due to connections with RVSC or someone concerned with the mission – which might in fact be one of the potential clients. Alternatively, the notable might have a different Agenda, like wanting to see expanded trade in the region or improving relations between worlds along the border.
I am important	The notable took the job because it offered an opportunity to show off and impress people. They are likely to be prone to risk-taking and showboating, caring more about their image than the details of the mission itself.
Cover	The notable has a deeper Agenda but will play one of the above roles as a cover. They may be a Fake or a Plant, or both.

FAKE

A twist on any of the other motivations, 'fake' indicates that the Traveller does not have the qualifications or experience to hold the post they have been assigned. They may have a false identity or blagged their way into the job. Nepotism and corporate favouritism are also possibilities. A Traveller might be present because they come from a noble family and the company wants their endorsement, or the Traveller might be a relative of the manager who selected the team. The fake might work hard to be worthy, or may coast along doing as little as possible.

Fake Motivations and Agendas

Agenda	Notes
Blagging it	The fake has managed to land this plumb job through a combination of luck, misunderstanding and sheer cheek. They may or may not have deliberately deceived anyone but now their performance is under the spotlight, their shortcomings are likely to be detected. The fake might try to weasel their way out of being blamed or rise to the occasion.
My family's money is important	The fake is along on the mission because their family's money or connections are important to RVSC. They could be quite well qualified or totally unsuited to the mission but some manager or other decided to overlook any shortcomings to get them on the mission. It is important to the company that the fake comes out looking good, which will influence decisions made by personnel along the way.
Nepotism and Corruption	The fake was appointed so they could add an important mission to their achievements. They may or may not be totally unsuited to the task at hand but someone at RVSC wants them to be on a highly successful mission and to come out looking good. If others have to lose out, so be it.
Cover	The fake is operating under false pretences. That might be a few forged certificates or a whole false identity. How good the cover identity is may become significant at some ports of call. Someone who is blagging it under the pretence of being a highly qualified expert but who does know a bit about their field may well get away with it until they have to prove their credentials for an entirely unrelated reason.

PLANT

A plant is someone working for an outside agency or government. Examples include intelligence personnel serving the Zhodani Consulate, Sword Worlds Confederation or the Imperium, or perhaps one of the local nobles or corporate bodies. A plant might be assigned to actively sabotage the mission or just gather information. Rival corporations will want to know what RVSC is doing whilst nobles might have political motivations. Alternatively, the mission might have been selected as a cover for agitation or intelligence gathering about the places visited along the way.

Plant Motivations and Agendas

Agenda	Notes
Intelligence Operative	The plant works for a major intelligence service, probably Imperial Naval Intelligence or its equivalent in the Sword Worlds or Zhodani Consulate. Their mission may be to observe the mission or monitor conditions at various ports of call.
Corporate Spy	The plant has been inserted by a rival corporation to steal information about the ship or the company. Disruption of the mission may or may not be on the agenda – stealing secrets is considered part of doing business but sabotage is likely to trigger retaliation.
Political Agent	The plant works for a major Imperial noble house or some organisation with an interest in the situation on the border. They may just want information, but it is possible that some agitation might be desirable in the hope of triggering a favourable situation.
Wild Card	The plant has joined the mission for reasons of their own. These might be political, monetary or outright crazy. This person has an Agenda of their own which may or may not align with the mission goals.

MAKING USE OF AGENDAS

To some extent the Agendas and motivations of the Travellers are for roleplaying purposes but they can be used as tools by the Referee. Knowing a Traveller's motivations allows side missions and other proposals to be pitched the right way to the right Traveller and may create a situation where the Travellers must choose whose Agenda is to be furthered. The Referee will also benefit from knowing what will tempt each Traveller and what is less likely to.

Travellers with certain motivations may have access to additional information or special treatment in some situations. For example, someone who has been an employee of RVSC for 10 years is more likely to be able to persuade a local representative to help them than an outsider hired for one mission. On the other hand, someone with political or intelligence contacts may have access to information unavailable on the datanets.

THE MISSION

The Travellers have taken a contract with the Reidd-Valaasii Starship Corporation, a medium-sized corporate body active in the starship customisation and refurbishment sector. Their mission is to showcase a new variant of the Type R subsidised merchant to a number of clients including world governments and corporate bodies between the Rhylanor and Vilis subsectors.

The ship is based on a major rebuild of the Type R, creating the unofficial designated Type R2A4 'fast trader'. This is a play on the 'fat trader' nickname of the original Type R, which was designed as a low-cost means of moving a reasonable amount of cargo along the mains and in the clusters. The design was a success and has been in service for a great many years but is limited by its one-parsec jump range which makes it efficient in local trade but unable to compete with faster ships for high-value cargoes. To be fair to the fat trader, it was never intended to do so and the standard model fulfils its design brief more than acceptably.

During its long career many variants of the Type R have appeared. Most are minor conversions, retaining the standard jump-1 and 1G acceleration performance of the original and therefore both its limitations and cost-effectiveness. RVSC has long been a source of these minor conversions but has also created significant variants with improved performance. The latest of these is the R2A4, which features jump-2 and 4G capability, along with internal modifications and enhanced armament.

The R2A4 is primarily intended to serve as a high-capacity secure trader capable of crossing between mains and clusters but has potential in other roles. These range from political and diplomatic duties as a low-cost yacht substitute, to patrol and escort work. A rescue and salvage variant is planned, with production of a prototype scheduled for the next few months.

STARSHIP SALES REPS

The role of the Travellers, put simply, is to sell the ship. Not the specific example they are operating but the concept and the class. RVSC is not looking to make a few Megacredits selling a single vessel, it wants bulk orders from governments. There will no doubt be lengthy negotiations to work through but the initial impression made by the Travellers will ease the process or perhaps make it possible in the first place. Therefore, the Travellers are assigned the mission of 'making a good impression' at every port of call. In some locations they will meet with local officials to discuss the vessel.

The Travellers are provided with a marketing package to be uploaded to the local datanets upon arrival. This essentially states that the ship is available for order and invites interested parties to get in touch, along with a great deal of exciting footage, catchy music and vast amounts of statistics and technical data. The Travellers will have to decide how best to deal with requests for inspections of the vessel or meetings with the crew.

There are certain destinations the ship is expected to visit and at most of these there is already some interest. The mission itinerary is as follows:

- After a few days to prepare and familiarise themselves with the ship the Travellers will depart Rhylanor for Jae Tellona, then cross onto the Spinward Main at Fulacin.
- From there they will proceed generally spinward on the Spinward Main making stops at Echiste, Dinomn and Extolay, before making a transit of the Vilis subsector to Arden.
- The planetary government of Arden has ambitions of becoming an interstellar polity and is interested in the R2A4 design, so this will be the most important pitch the Travellers make on their voyage.

In addition to generally making a good impression, the Travellers are expected to undertake actions intended to make an order more likely. They may have to put up with annoying local officials or system patrol personnel but hopefully the rewards will be worth it. Those rewards will vary according to the degree of success encountered. Each Traveller who has joined the mission will receive Cr100000 up front which can be spent before beginning the voyage. In addition, there is a stipend of Cr10000 per month payable by automated transfer. Essentially, this means ship's computer makes a transfer on the last day of the month, drawing on a line of credit set up for its use. Additional funds may be made available if a need can be demonstrated.

The real payoff comes at the end of the mission and depends on how well the Travellers do. Starship procurement takes time and there is no guarantee that

any agreement in principle will lead to sales. However, RVSC will pay bonuses based on the Travellers' performance, which will be augmented at a later date if sales are actually made. This means the Travellers might receive significant amounts of money in a few years' time. In the interim there is a possibility that RVSC may transfer ownership of the prototype to the Travellers if they perform well enough.

Ownership will be subject to certain conditions, including a contractual obligation not to make RVSC or the R2A4 design look bad. Apart from that, the Travellers will own the ship free and clear. They will be permitted to sell it, subject to approval from Head Office, or set it up with a hired crew on a suitable trade run. Even if the Travellers already have a more suitable ship, the prototype can be a lucrative asset.

OTHER CREW

The Travellers will not be operating alone on this mission. Three personnel have been assigned to assist and support them, and they will have additional help in operating the vessel. A new virtual crew system has been installed aboard their ship, enabling the vessel to be operated remotely or by a single individual. The system does not have any sort of free will; it can only execute orders or follow standing protocols. These include an emergency return-to-port routine which features automatic completion of any necessary paperwork and inserting a request for recovery into the local communications nets. The ship will then pay necessary fees to avoid being seized whilst it waits for a crew to reclaim it.

RVSC is open about this being as much a security measure as a safety protocol. The ship is set up to make for the nearest port in system in an emergency and that includes an attempt by the Travellers to make off with it. The feature will be removed if the vessel is given to the Travellers but until that point an RVSC representative can trigger the protocol and disable the vessel in a manner that will not directly endanger the crew. Attempts to disable the function or tamper with the ship's programming will also result in disablement.

If the Travellers are suspicious about the mission they may ask – or try to find out by some other means – why regular RVSC employees are not assigned this important task. The truth is that the company is stretched thin but in a good way. Multiple clients are interested in refurbished or modified Type Rs, and some of the prospective deals are rather complex. The R2A4 was put together as a technology demonstrator for a client who ended up ordering several examples of a different design. Local management found themselves with a demonstrator vessel which needed to pay for itself and decided to try to create sales with it rather than leave it lying around. In short, this mission is a piece of opportunism on the part of the company. It will hopefully offset the cost of building the prototype but if not little has been lost.

JOACHIM KRYSTALFUCHS

Joachim's surname translates to 'crystal fox' in an archaic Terran language, predictably leading to the nickname of 'foxy', which irritates him to a considerable degree. He is an employee of the RVSC corporation and has been with them for nearly 10 years. Before that he served a term in the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service, which he hated, and then spent a while on temporary contracts aboard free traders and other small merchant craft. Working for RVSC gave him what he had always wanted; a structure.

One reason for his dissatisfaction with free trader and scout life was that Joachim cannot tolerate disorganisation and chaos. He is not a particularly imaginative individual but finds satisfaction in knowing what he is supposed to do and being recognised for doing it. In that, he is a perfect crewmember for a well-run ship – competent, reliable and not prone to having brilliant ideas that go against policy or the current plan.

Joachim is aboard as a crewmember-in-general. He can fill several positions, although is not very skilled in any of them. Normally his role would be routine maintenance and backup steward, but he can also help out in engineering or with general tasks aboard the vessel. He is cheerful and willing to work so long as he is respected but resents being treated as an underling.

Joachim's motivation is 'just doing my job' and he has no hidden agenda. However, he is very loyal to RVSC as he has been well treated during his time with the firm. He will not go against their interests unless there is a very good reason to do so or he is deceived, which he will resent. For this reason Joachim has been entrusted with an override-all passcode for the ship. He can, if necessary, lock everyone else out of the command system and take control of the auto-crew system. This will enable him to lock himself in a secure location and order the ship to make for the nearest port in-system. He is well aware of the level of trust given to him and feels honoured. He will not reveal any of this other than in a dire emergency and if the Travellers have earned his respect he will give them every chance to resolve the situation before triggering a shutdown.

JOACHIM KRYSTALFUCHS, CREWMEMBER FIRST CLASS

STR 8 **DEX** 9 **END** 9 **INT** 4 **EDU** 6 **SOC** 6
Diplomat 0, Electronics (sensors) 1, Engineer (power) 1, Jack-of-all-Trades 1, Mechanic 2, Navigation 0, Persuade 0, Pilot 0, Streetwise 0, Steward 1, Vacc Suit 1

Weapons: Shipboard-Eight Semi-Automatic Pistol (3D-2)
Armour: TRVSC Vacc Suit (+9)
Equipment: Maintenance Tools

STANNEN VAANAII, JUNIOR RVSC EXECUTIVE

STR 4 **DEX** 8 **END** 5 **INT** 11 **EDU** 13 **SOC** 9
Admin 2, Advocate 1, Broker 0, Diplomat 2, Electronics (computers) 0, Leadership 1, Persuade 1

Armour: RVSC Vacc Suit (+9)
Equipment: Portacomp

STANNEN VAANAII, JUNIOR RVSC EXECUTIVE

Stannen is a tall, elegant person of indeterminate gender. They dress in traditional Vilani style when not wearing the mandated company vacc suit or executive dress, and occasionally drop quotes in old Vilani into conversation. This can come off as rather pretentious but it is an artefact of Stannen's home society, where Vilani traditions were highly regarded and every educated person was expected to be able to converse in the ancient language. It is unlikely that Stannen has much Vilani blood in their heritage, placing them in the category of 'cultural Vilani' rather than 'racial Vilani'.

Be that as it may, Stannen comes from a well-off background and has an excellent education. This led to a fast-track career as a junior executive and when the present mission came up Stannen beat out all competition to secure a place aboard as the company's official representative. Stannen knows they are operating at a higher level than they are qualified for and has become a little insecure about it. At times they are confident and assured they will rise to the challenge; at others they worry about wrecking the mission with a bad decision. Travellers who become good friends with Stannen might act as mentors and help them blossom into an excellent leader, which will earn them long-term advantages as Stannen rises up the ranks of the company. Stannen's Agenda can be taken as 'corporate ladder' with an unhealthy dose of 'blagging it.'

Despite this self-doubt Stannen is a good diplomat and a reasonable administrator, and is loyal to the company. This mission could be a career-making event and Stannen really wants to succeed for personal reasons. At the same time they genuinely want everyone to benefit – the company, the Travellers and the clients – and firmly believe that 'good business is good for everyone'. One problem here is that for cultural reasons

Stannen is a little too honest for the role and may have to be… guided… by more savvy Travellers from being too fair to a client who is not dealing entirely straight.

Stannen is well aware of the emergency shutdown/return to port protocol but does not know that Joachim has been entrusted with the highest level of control. This will not cause resentment if Stannen finds out but it would certainly be a surprise to find the only management-level official present can be over-ridden by a crewmember. Stannen's home society is rather hierarchical and such a thing would not be expected.

MANINRA HEISS

Maninra is aboard as a security advisor, which means she is concerned with the safety of the vessel and the mission as well as making sure the Travellers do not wander off with the ship. She began her career as a steward with Tukera Lines but showed an aptitude for shipboard security and gradually moved into that role. Eventually, her experience and skills came to the notice of a corporate head-hunter and RVSC made her an offer Tukera was unwilling to match. On the current mission she has reverted to a poise she used with Tukera; the helpful and friendly steward nobody notices. Her brief is to quietly observe and facilitate the mission when it is going well, offering advice or straight-out shutting down any activity that seems too risky or is not in the interests of the company.

In-keeping with her role as the near-invisible steward, Maninra says little most of the time and is just 'there' in the background doing something innocuous. She is adept at predicting what guests will like and having a perfect cocktail almost ready just as they realise they want one. She can also do wonders with even basic starship ration packs, so with the luxury foods available on this mission she is likely to create gourmet delights just for the sake of it. The Travellers will be told that Maninra is the mission's security expert but she would consider it a triumph if they were to forget and start treating her like a servant. Privately, she would feel contempt for people so easily duped but she is a stone-cold professional who will stay in character until the job is complete.

Maninra's Agenda is 'I need to prove myself'. Although she is now an employee of RVSC she came from Tukera Lines quite recently and needs to demonstrate she was worth the large salary increase. If the Travellers dig a little into her background they may find Maninra a little suspicious, perhaps thinking she might be a plant sent by Tukera Lines to spy on the mission. This is untrue but it is close to a different secret; Maninra is loyal to her new employers but has agreed to provide information to an Imperial Naval Intelligence programme which monitors conditions in the border subsectors. Some of her activities might look suspicious, perhaps for the wrong reasons.

MANINRA HEISS, 'STEWARD' AND SECURITY EXPERT

STR 11 **DEX** 7 **END** 10 **INT** 10 **EDU** 6 **SOC** 5
Admin 1, Athletics (strength) 1, Carouse 1, Deception 2, Diplomat 1, Electronics (comms) 3, Gun Combat (energy) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Investigate 2, Steward 1, Vacc Suit 1

Weapons: Shipboard-Eight or Compact-Eight Semi-Automatic Pistol (3D-2), Laser Carbine (4D+4, Zero-G)
Armour: RVSC Vacc Suit (+9)
Equipment: Modified Comm (with verification codes for intelligence uploads)

When engaged in routine shipboard activities Maninra is not routinely armed but she has a laser carbine and three semi-automatic pistols in her quarters. Two are compact concealable weapons which she will usually carry when planetside; the third is a full-sized handgun to be worn openly. Maninra has override and lockout access to the armoury and no-one aboard can countermand this. She would normally leave the armoury in its default condition – locked but available to any crewmember upon presenting their identification to the door security system. Only if she suspects foul play would she deny crewmembers access to the weapons lockers.

REFEREE'S INFORMATION

The following information is for the use of the Referee. The Travellers will be able to find out some or even all of it if they make sufficient effort, but there is no guarantee that everything they discover is true. In general, the easier a piece of information is to obtain the less detailed and accurate it is likely to be. It is possible that deliberate deception may have taken place, perhaps for political or economic ends or to conceal an awkward truth.

THE REIDD-VALAASII STARSHIP CORPORATION

RVSC was formed in 861 from a merger of smaller corporations, some of which had been operating for a very long time. The company makes much of this ancient pedigree in its promotional materials, although it has little effect on today's business. Its head office is at Deneb, with regional offices in the Spinward Marches and Corridor. The firm's main yard in the Spinward Marches is at Rhylanor.

The company is not a shipbuilder as such. Its primary market is in refurbished and modified vessels, some of which are outfitted to order whilst others receive standard upgrade and modification packages. The majority of RVSC's business is in the low-cost end of the market, selling refurbished free traders and subsidised merchants to individual clients or small merchant lines. When a higher-end client wants a specific conversion they will usually provide the vessel, although RVSC can buy in a hull and essential systems, outfitting the ship around its critical machinery.

Standard practice is to buy vessels that have become uneconomical to refit or which have been repossessed for mortgage default. Those deemed unsuitable for refurbishment are broken up for salvage or used for experimentation but the majority are overhauled and offered for sale. RVSC can afford to undertake this work where a private owner might not as the company has regional outfitting and repair yards. These standard refurbishments are relatively inexpensive for a company with long experience of performing them. Ships are sometimes returned to their original layout but more commonly slight modifications are necessitated by the vessel's condition. For this reason a line of outwardly identical free traders offered for sale may differ internally.

Many vessels are offered for sale at the Rhylanor installation or delivered to customers across the sector after being bought from a digital catalogue. In other cases the firm will be contracted to supply a number of vessels to a merchant line on a specified time frame. RVSC is adept at predicting what it will be able to deliver but occasionally market conditions cause a problem. This can lead to a flurry of procurement efforts or the need to buy in ships requiring expensive major refits.

This low-end activity keeps RVSC solvent but the firm has ambitions of moving upmarket. Some vessel conversions undertaken are quite expensive, especially since one-off customisation takes longer than a standard refurbishment. However, upmarket is where the money is. The current strategy is to use the more extensive conversions as the basis for a new line of upgraded variants. This allows standard hulls and machinery to be bought in at a reasonable price then fitted to a higher-end specification.

GOVERNMENTAL PROCUREMENT

An individual with funds available can, in theory, just hand over payment on a starship they like and fill out the paperwork. Governmental and similar procurement processes are much lengthier. All decisions must be justified to a higher authority, with long periods of discussion in between. This is hardly surprising given the amounts of money involved in buying multiple starships and all the other concerns that must be juggled to produce a final decision.

The procurement process usually begins with the government, shipping line or other client producing a statement of its requirements. Just agreeing on this can be a long process, especially when there are multiple agencies within the client which all have their own desires. The details of starship operations might not be of much interest to a governmental official representing an industrial or social sector but the effects of buying

those ships will be. Will the purchase create jobs? Will it bring greater prosperity to certain cities? Could the money not be better spent on something else?

Different governments may have various ways of dealing with this process but there are always multiple considerations to balance. One way to get governmental departments to agree is a process called offset. Offset attempts, as the name suggests, to offset some of the costs of a deal by getting something extra out of it. This can become very complex and may actually push the cost up rather than down, but even that can be of benefit if some of the money comes from a different agency. For example, a government might offer a contract to build six in-system patrol vessels, on condition that the builder also constructs a starport extension at a very low price. This satisfies other government departments which are more concerned about trade than security. The starship builder may be able to undertake the starport job itself but may have to sub-contract – and that deal might also be subject to an offset. This all makes procurement very costly and complex, making offset deals a perfect place to hide less official parts of the arrangement.

Given the amount of money involved, it is perhaps inevitable that corruption is commonplace. Bribes and favours are an accepted part of doing business in some societies and by a great many people even where they are supposedly not. Even where direct bribery is not a factor, many procurement deals are influenced by politics and personal advancement. For example, a politician might select one deal over another for the effect it will have on popular opinion. Navies have at times had to make do with inappropriate or underperforming equipment because a politician wanted to be seen to be 'tough on military overspending'. The opposite sometimes happens, such as when an extravagant deal sails through just because a political opponent spoke out against it.

Companies operating in the sector must navigate this minefield and the most successful ones know how to manipulate it. A given politician might be incorruptible with simple bribery but could be swayed by considerations of the benefits a given deal would bring. New merchant ships mean greater prosperity and will create jobs in supporting industries, increasing the popularity of the architect of the situation.

There is no possible way a procurement deal can be swung on a single skill check. Even if the Travellers somehow got an official totally and permanently on their side the inertia of the process prevents instant success. If they are to sell the concept of their ship the Travellers must work slowly and patiently, sowing seeds and moving on to the next target. Procurement is a marathon at best and sometimes it can become a slog through the riddle maze of elder wisdom. On the other hand, there would be no big pay-outs if the job was easy.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MISSION

The mission, overall, is above board and legal. There is no double-dealing on the part of RVSC. However, that does not mean there is no element of politics – internal to the corporation and on a wider scale – involved. The R2A4 prototype was developed as a technology demonstrator, incorporating equipment that various potential clients had indicated they might like to see. A few extras were added, either as experiments or due to the agenda of someone at RVSC. Among these is an automated intelligence-gathering and analysis package the company should not have had access to.

There are layers to the mission. Just under the surface is an agenda to gather information on market conditions and the state of the shipping industry in the target area. This is perfectly legitimate in the context of market research; all successful businesses do something similar. However, RVSC has co-opted the intelligence package to assist in this endeavour. Use of a classified piece of equipment for commercial gain is a violation of multiple laws, although the firm might manage to get away with it with the polite fiction that it was conducting a field test on behalf of a potential client – the Imperial Navy. If RVSC has enough friends in high places it might pull that off.

There is, however, a deeper layer to the agenda. The use of the intelligence package for commercial purposes is a cover for its real intent – to gather military intelligence on shipping and naval assets in a highly sensitive area. RVSC is an Imperial company but not all of its employees are patriots. Some are quite willing to take money from an unknown client to manipulate a deal with Imperial Naval Intelligence, and to arrange for a classified system containing fresh data from within the Imperium to be aboard a ship headed out across the border. The Travellers have no way of knowing but they have signed up to deliver classified equipment to the Imperium's old enemy, the Zhodani Consulate.

None of the company personnel aboard know anything about this – it is a hands-off operation masterminded by an Imperial noble who is in the pocket of the Zhodani. Espionage of this sort takes place all the time, with varying degrees of success. However, the timing of the 'pinch', as the intelligence community calls such an operation, will be significant. Events are unfolding in the Abyss region that could have long-term effects.

THE INTELLIGENCE PACKAGE

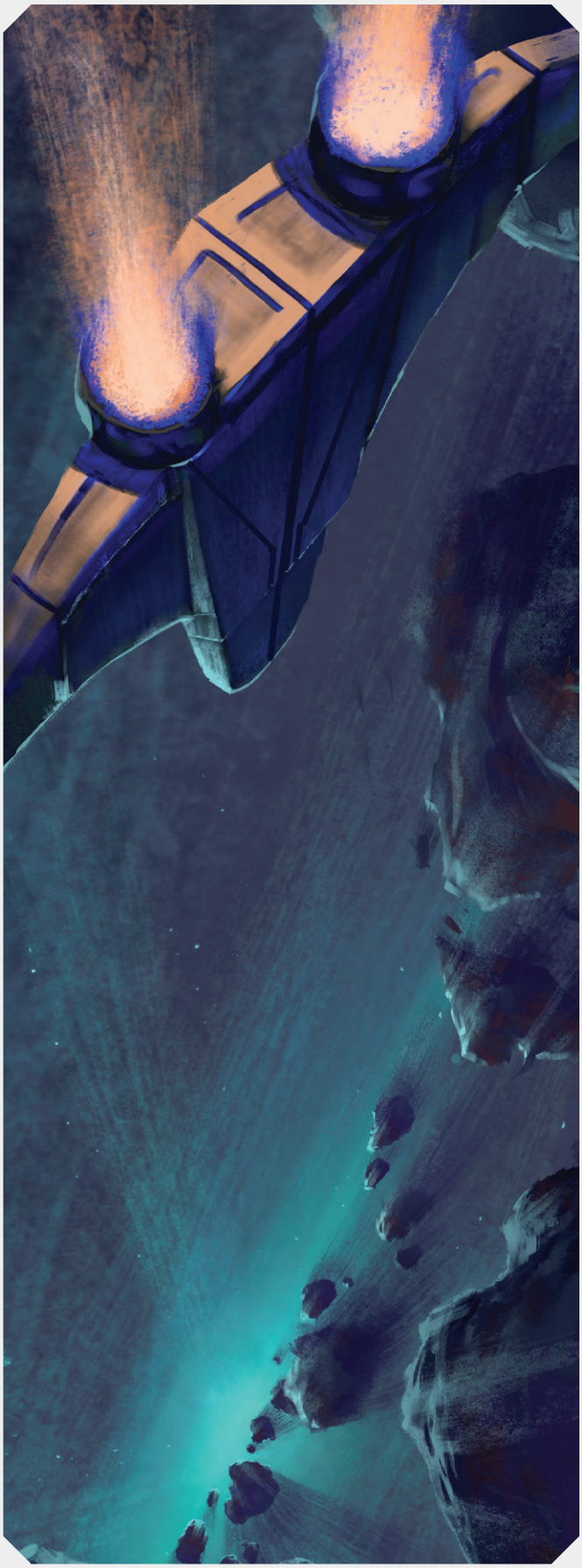
The package is a physical device buried deep in the ship's computer. Getting it out would require dismantling the computer and replacing some components. It is not large, however, consisting only of a few components that look like most others. There is nothing about these blocks to indicate they are not an integral part of the computer.

The package is designed to accept sensor data from the ship's systems as well as any information directly sent to it. This would normally be by way of an encrypted signal buried in the normal comms chatter. The device is also programmed with known parameters of a great many ships and craft. It can extrapolate from a few fragments of sensor data, gradually building up a picture of what is around it.

The package cannot 'see' anything the host ship's sensors cannot but its database allows it to fit the tiniest pieces of information together. If the host ship is picking up faint drive emissions halfway across the star system it would normally not be able to make much of them other than knowing that something is moving. The intelligence package might be able to cross-reference the emissions and create an estimate of what kind of ship is producing them. Gradually this can be narrowed down until a class of ship or perhaps even a specific vessel is identified.

This all takes place at the local level but the package is also intended for strategic analysis. It knows the doctrines and standard patterns of movement used by Imperial and Zhodani fleet assets, and can often predict a ship's mission with a reasonable degree of confidence. Building on this, a picture can be developed of what an entire fleet is doing; changes in patrol deployments and the movement of supporting assets such as tankers can indicate a major fleet operation. This requires a great deal of up to date information, however, and predictions become looser and less accurate when older information is used.

These features are all experimental and subject to errors at times. The Travellers will not be aware of the device aboard their ship for most of the campaign but once they do know about it they may be able to use it to their advantage. The Referee can use the intelligence package as a sort of 'oracle', providing generally useful but sometimes misleading information which can draw the Travellers into new adventures.



THE R2A4 PROTOTYPE

The Referee should assume the Travellers were asked about their preferences when they took the job and the final fitting-out took place whilst they were en route to Rhylanor. This means that the Travellers can customise their vessel a little; when they are presented with the ship everything they asked for will be in place. At first glance the R2A4 looks a lot like a standard Type R, the hull form generally the same, except that there is no launch riding on the dorsal surface. A bulge, effectively creating a small upper deck, has been added where the launch used to be. Depending on the Travellers' decisions this may have one of two purposes: additional armament or a luxury suite. The R2A4 is also in general sleeker than the original design, featuring retractable aerofins to assist atmospheric manoeuvring.

There are no rear cargo doors, although the hull styling is such that from a distance it may seem they are still present. The reason for this is a change to the propulsion and power systems. The original Type R has a split engineering section, with cargo space between the chambers. This can be inconvenient for a lone engineer, especially when there is awkwardly shaped cargo in the way, but most functions can be carried out from a control station on one side or the other. In short, the split engineering section of the standard Type R facilitates efficient cargo operations under normal conditions but in an emergency can impair damage control or complex operations.

The R2A4 still has the original engineering chambers but between them is a whole new drive section, with a fuel tank inserted forward of it. This takes up a significant part of the cargo deck and makes rear loading impossible. Forward of this the cargo area is retained, accessed by way of clamshell doors in the nose and two large side doors. With the latter open the cargo deck is surprisingly light and airy. Another change is the boarding arrangement. The original Type R assumes passengers come aboard by way of the launch, or from a starport gantry leading directly into the upper deck. In this variant boarding is by way of hatches located just aft of the side cargo doors, or through the cargo doors themselves. An elevator/stairway leads up to the main deck through where two of the cabins used to be.

Other variants of the Type R retain jump-1 capability but add fuel tankage to permit two jumps. This may be dedicated fuel or a fuel tank/cargo area which can be used for one or the other at need. Some have been converted to liners with additional cabins and recreation spaces in the cargo area, whilst others have been made into low-end passenger or mercenary transports with blocks of less salubrious accommodation. Another possibility is the addition of working areas and suites for VIPs, creating a sort of low-cost dual-purpose yacht or corporate trade scout. In that role the Type R variant will carry samples rather than shipping cargo for direct profit, attempting to secure contracts for goods over the longer term which will then be delivered by more cost-efficient vessels.

The upper deck has also been extensively remodelled. This variant is not intended to carry passengers for profit but might take officials along on a cruise to demonstrate the vessel's capabilities. Gone are the twin rows of cabins, in favour of accommodation for crew and guests as well as chambers intended to make a good impression on visitors. This is not a commercially viable ship in the usual sense; it is a vessel designed to facilitate the making of deals bringing in large amounts of money.

The Type R2A4 has 74 tons of unallocated space, of which 20 tons are located in the dorsal bulge where the launch used to be. Most of the remainder is on the former cargo deck and can be left as cargo space if the crew desire. The cargo hold is two decks high on the standard Type R but variants like the R2A4 typically install a middle deck for systems and accommodation. Cargo areas remain two decks high to allow for awkwardly shaped items to be stowed.

The prototype has a much more capable computer system than production models are likely to have. It uses a core/70 whereas the standard model would probably have a computer/20. This adds MCr75 to the theoretical price tag of the ship and was installed primarily to allow virtual crew packages to run alongside more common software. This vessel is a technology demonstrator and was never intended to be able to pay for itself directly. Whether any prospective client would want the auto-crew system is an open question but it does give the operators some additional options.

TYPE R2A4

TYPE: —

TL12		Tons	Cost (MCr)
Hull	400 tons, Streamlined	—	24
	Aerofins	20	2
M-Drive	Thrust 4 (energy efficient)	16	35.2
J-Drive	Jump 2 (energy efficient)	25	41.25
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 345	23	23
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 20 weeks of operation	95	—
Bridge	—	20	2
	Sensor Stations x4	4	2
Computer	Core/70	—	80
Sensors	Improved	3	4.3
	Improved Signal Processing	1	4
Weapons	Triple Turrets (pulse lasers) x2	2	8
Armoured Bulkheads	Bridge	2	0.4
	Engineering Chamber (power plant and drives)	6.4	1.28
	Secure Cargo Area (20 tons)	2	0.4
Systems	Fuel Processor (80 tons/day)	4	0.2
	Cargo Crane	3	3
	Repair Drones	4	0.8
	Armouries x2	2	0.5
	Briefing Rooms x4	16	2
	Concealed Compartment	20	0.4
	Library	4	4
	Medical Bay	4	2
	Workshop	6	0.9
Staterooms	High x2	12	1.6
	Standard x6	24	3
Common Areas		24	2.4
Software	Manoeuvre	—	—
	Anti-Hijack/2	—	8
	Jump Control/2	—	0.2
	Fire Control/2	—	4
	Library	—	—
	Intellect	—	—
	Virtual Crew/1	—	5
	Virtual Gunner/1	—	5
Cargo/Unallocated Space		57	—

Crew

Special

Hull: 160

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr22569/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr270.83

Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems

80

Manoeuvre Drive

120

Jump Drive

60

Sensors

5

Weapons

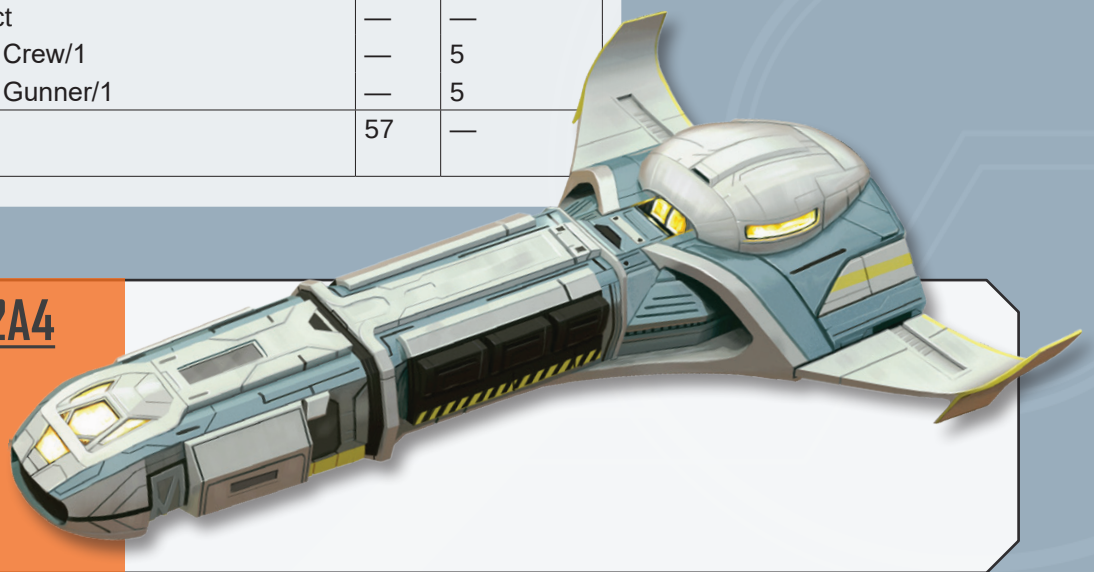
26

Fuel Processor

4

systems

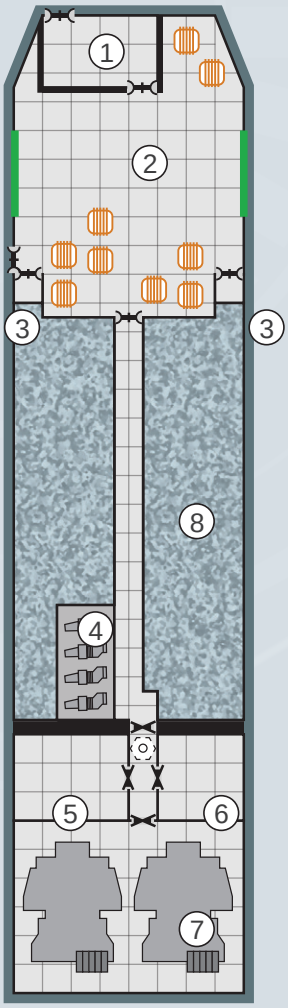
2



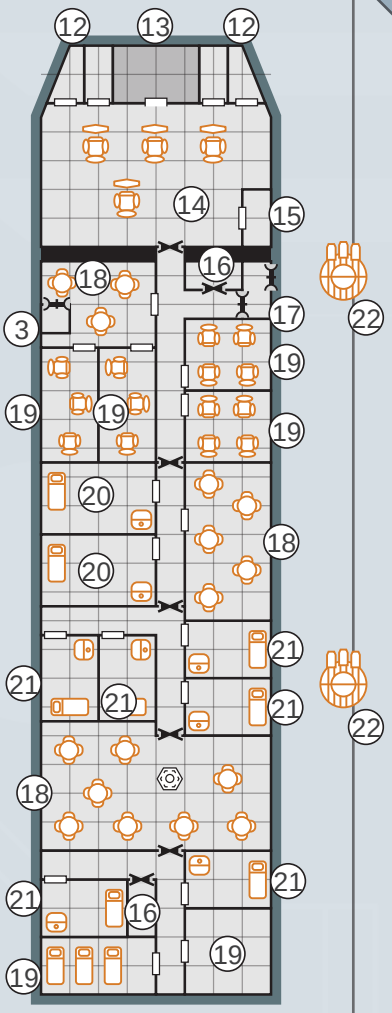
TYPE R2A4

1 square = 1 Ton

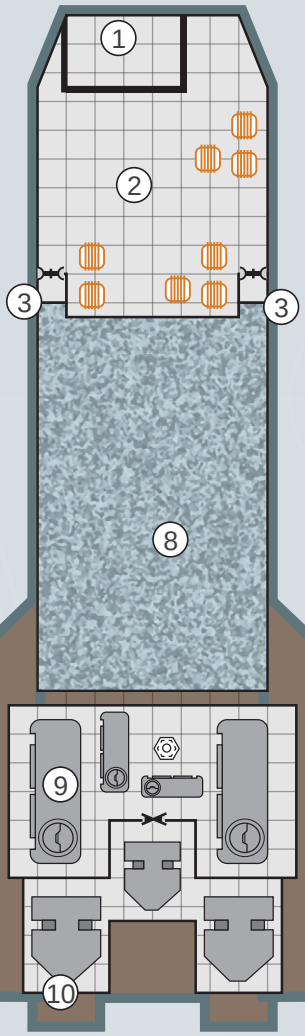
1. Secure cargo hold
2. Cargo hold
3. Lift
4. Fuel processor
5. Workshop
6. Repair drones
7. Jump drive
8. Fuel
9. Power plant
10. Manoeuvre drive
11. Concealed compartment
12. Sensor stations
13. Sensors
14. Bridge
15. Improved signal processing
16. Armoury
17. Airlock
18. Common area
19. Briefing room
20. High stateroom
21. Stateroom
22. Triple turret (pulse laser)



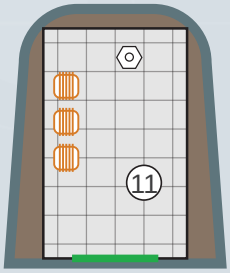
LOWER DECK



UPPER DECK



MIDDLE DECK



DORSAL BUMP

UPPER DECK

The forward part of the upper deck is given over to command spaces, which are protected by heavy bulkheads. These are more about security against internal threats than defending against other starships. The forward command area contains the bridge, an armoury and a small amount of common space set up as a comfortable working area for additional crew.

Aft of the command chamber is the business centre of the ship. A configurable common area and presentation chamber are set up to keep guests entertained and comfortable whilst they learn all about how great this variant is. There is a well-stocked wine and spirits cabinet containing a variety of upmarket brands, although how long it remains well-stocked is an open question. This area can also be used for dining, with meals prepared in the adjoining galley.

Further aft is the crew accommodation block. It is currently set up with two high staterooms and six standard ones, plus a medical bay and some common space. The former boarding area is now used for storage for the most part, with access to the dorsal bulge on vessels requiring it. The bulge contains 20 tons of the ship's unallocated space.

MID AND LOWER DECK

The former cargo deck is two levels high, although a mid-deck can be installed to support any additional cabins or systems which have been added. The forwardmost section of the deck is a secure cargo area, surrounded by armoured bulkheads, with a capacity of 20 tons. This is not part of the unallocated tonnage, although this area could be used to install additional systems.

Aft of the secure cargo area is most of the unallocated tonnage. If this area is not repurposed it can hold about 50 tons of cargo in addition to any in the secure area. Personnel entry to the ship is by way of hatchways located slightly aft of the big side cargo doors. An enclosed elevator/stairwell on each side of the hull gives access to the upper deck. Another hatch, normally kept secured, leads to a tunnel running aft through the fuel tanks to engineering. The tunnel is lined with lockers for various spares and components. Two of the lockers are dummies, each giving access to a concealed compartment. Careful analysis of the ship's fuel needs compared to its apparent capacity might reveal there was some discrepancy but modifications are always a little inefficient, so loss of 5% of hull capacity as dead space might go unremarked.

Right aft is the greatly enlarged drive and power chamber, which also contains a small workshop. This area is normally off-limits to passengers and is surrounded by heavy security bulkheads. If the concealed compartments and secure area are used in conjunction with the remaining cargo hold, the vessel has a nominal capacity of 114 tons. However, since the cargo area is subdivided it may not be possible to pack this efficiently. Capacity might be further reduced by additional component blocks added at the Travellers' request.

DORSAL BULGE MODIFICATIONS

The dorsal bulge is designed to accept a custom 20-ton 'systems block' which can contain a variety of equipment and accommodation. These blocks can be added to any existing subsidised merchant, although this costs 20% more than outfitting one at the time of its rebuild. If no systems are installed in the bulge it remains as a 20-ton open space which could be used for stowage but which is very awkward as a cargo area.

MISSILE BATTERY

The missile battery modification uses two of the vessel's four hardpoints to add a formidable arsenal of missiles to the ship's capabilities. Two barbettes are fitted, each with a missile magazine, with a small command chamber between them. If other turrets are shipped these can be controlled from the gunnery room.

ACCOMMODATION SUITE

The accommodation suite might be used to turn the ship into a low-cost yacht or to carry high-paying passengers who feel they are too good for the ship's standard accommodation. The accommodation suite consists of a luxury cabin and a standard one – for guests and underlings – a private lounge/dining area and a secure stowage section equivalent to a rather more luxurious armoury.

SECURE TRANSPORTATION UNIT

The Travellers are unlikely to choose this option but some users might find it desirable to be able to transport prisoners. This variant is on offer to the Imperial Navy and the Ministry of Justice, and has already found some potential users among local governments. There are two cell groups, each capable of holding six prisoners in modest discomfort, plus a small entry and exercise area. A secure storage area allows prisoners' personal effects and 'compliance assistance equipment' to be stowed.

MISSILE BATTERY

TL12		Tons	Cost (MCr)
Bridge	Command Chamber (4x sensor stations)	4	2
Weapons	Missile Barbettes x2	10	8
Ammunition	Missile Storage (36 missiles) x2	6	—
Total : MCr10			

Crew

Gunnery Officer, Gunner

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr833/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr10

Power Requirements

Weapons

0

ACCOMMODATION SUITE

TL12		Tons	Cost (MCr)
Systems	Armoury	1	0.25
Staterooms	Luxury	10	1.5
	Standard	4	0.5
Common Areas		5	0.5
Total: MCr2.75			

Crew

None

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr229/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr2.75

SECURE TRANSPORTATION UNIT

TL12		Tons	Cost (MCr)
Armoured Bulkheads	Whole Unit	1.8	0.36
Weapons	Dual Turret (sandcaster, beam laser)	1	1.25
Systems	Armoury	1	0.25
Staterooms	Brig	8	0.5
	Standard	4	0.5
Common Areas		4	0.4
Total: MCr3.26			

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr272/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr3.26

Power Requirements

Weapons

5

INTERNAL ACCOMMODATION UNIT

TL12		Tons	Cost (MCr)
Armoured Bulkheads	Whole Unit	3.6	0.72
Staterooms	High x2	12	1.6
	Standard x4	16	2
Common Areas		8	0.8
Total: MCr 5.12			

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr427/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr5.12

The whole block is surrounded by a heavy bulkhead with additional security features on the access points and a remote-controlled point defence turret housing a sandcaster and beam laser is fitted atop the bulge to discourage unwanted visitors. The turret cannot be accessed from inside the bulge.

INTERNAL ACCOMMODATION UNIT

Users wishing to increase the vessel's passenger capacity can replace 40 tons of internal cargo space with additional cabins. These are built two decks high between the lift/stairwell units and take up most of the available cargo space. Access to what little cargo space remains is by way of small hatches in the sides of the ship; the large side cargo doors are removed as they are partially blocked by the new accommodation area.

Essentially this modification converts the vessel into a liner of sorts and is often accompanied by the luxury suite in the dorsal bulge and a conversion of the forward secure cargo bay. The accommodation block is on two levels; the high staterooms and main lounge are on the top floor, with the standard staterooms and a tiny common area on the lower one. The whole block is surrounded by a solid bulkhead, more for structural than defensive reasons.

VEHICLE GARAGE

This modification converts the forward secure cargo area into a small vehicle garage with a maintenance area. Standard configuration allows for two ground cars and two air/rafts, all of which are carried in secure cradles when not in use. If the Travellers choose this option they will be provided with 14 shipping tons of vehicles which can be a mix of G/bikes, grav floaters, air/rafts and ground cars. ATVs and military vehicles are not available.

HOSPITALITY SUITE

Often paired with an additional accommodation unit, the hospitality suite turns the forward secure cargo area into a recreation and dining area. It has a dedicated galley and is fitted out to a luxurious standard, but the main feature is the glazed forward dome. Essentially the front of the ship is turned into an observatory, whose armoured ceramic panels can be turned opaque or used as a projection area for holographic presentations… or even a backdrop for live-action/holographic plays.

Travellers who make good use of this modification should be permitted a positive DM on attempts to impress or influence guests. This will typically be DM+1 or +2 but may be higher if the Travellers do a lot of preparation or really put some effort in. It will still not be possible to instantly sell hundreds of ships to a client but this stage of the process will be facilitated.

VEHICLE GARAGE

TL12

		Tons	Cost (MCr)
Systems	Workshop	6	0.9
	Vehicles	14	—
Total: MCr0.9			

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST
Cr75/month
PURCHASE COST
MCr0.9

HOSPITALITY SUITE

TL12

		Tons	Cost (MCr)
Hull	Modified Nose Section	—	2
Common Areas	Luxury	20	5
Total: MCr7			

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST
Cr583.33/month
PURCHASE COST
MCr7

AUTOCREW

The R2A4 prototype has an advanced 'Autocrew' capability, theoretically allowing it to operate under remote control or even to carry out missions with no crew aboard. Interstellar law requires that any starship or space vessel have a designated master, which raises questions as to whether a 'drone' starship would be viable. There are also reportedly problems with jump operations without a live astrogator aboard the ship. RVSC has no interest whatsoever in researching these matters using expensive ship prototypes – or at all for that matter – so the R2A4 is not programmed to conduct jump operations automatically. It can carry out missions within a star system, which is probably legal providing the ship's designated master is also present in the system to take responsibility for its actions.

The Autocrew can carry out most other functions, although physical tasks that cannot be performed by the ship's cleaning robots are impossible. The auto-steward function can, for example, regulate the oven temperature to cook a pie perfectly but someone will have to combine the ingredients and place the dish in the oven. The Travellers may worry about their vessel turning into some kind of robotic death-trap but this is not possible. The Autocrew consists of several distinct functions, none of which have more than limited decision-making capability. These are not artificial intelligences and have no free will; they are expert systems intended to help the crew.

Normally the Autocrew can be given instructions by anyone designated as a crewmember, with preference given to those with responsibility for the relevant area. Thus when the pilot gives orders to the auto-manoeuvring system these will over-rule whatever the steward has told it to do. There are exceptions to this; the three RVSC employees aboard can over-rule anything the Travellers have ordered the system to do and Joachim can trigger the emergency lockdown no matter what anyone else has to say about it.

AUTOBRIDGE

The AutoBridge function is more than an automatic pilot. It can plot normal-space courses and fly the ship, and is also capable of handling communications and sensors tasks. Under normal conditions the AutoBridge package maintains a sensor watch and will carry out course optimisation manoeuvres whenever needed. It will also attempt to avoid collisions, notifying the crew of hazards before it does so. The package has an effective skill level of 1 when carrying out all of these functions.

AutoBridge can, in theory, take the ship from one landing pad to another on the other side of the star system with nothing more than verbal commands from someone lounging in a hot tub in the dorsal bulge. It is not the best of pilots, however, and will err on the side of caution unless explicitly instructed to take a more aggressive approach. This will not show the ship off very well, so Travellers are expected to handle demonstrations of piloting. On the other hand, the ability to constantly optimise a course requires nothing more than endless number-crunching and will quietly impress those who understand the value of shaving a few minutes off an interplanetary transit.

AUTOENGINEER

The AutoEngineer function runs the drives and power systems, and is capable of making fine corrections on a constant basis. This in theory saves a little fuel by optimising power output and drive thrust but in practice the difference is very small. There is also an auto-diagnostic feature which should be very useful in fault-finding. However, it has serious faults that have so far escaped the notice of the programming team. The system has never been run continuously for more than a few days, which has prevented the flaw from appearing.

When the AutoEngineer system has been running for more than a couple of weeks, small mathematical errors start to corrupt its function. These will go unnoticed at first as the system's self-diagnostics correct for them. After this time, there is an increasing chance of a malfunction or a false alarm regarding one of the ship's systems. This might be anything from a desk lamp to the jump drive. Malfunctions should be small and worrying or irritating rather than dangerous at first, causing the Travellers to start looking for problems. The false alarms will then drive them crazy by directing them to systems that are working perfectly well but register as being the source of the problem.

After a bit of running around fixing non-existent problems and chasing real ones in the wrong place, the Travellers may tire of the AutoEngineer package. It is unlikely to cause life-threatening problems but will become a constant irritant. However, turning it off removes part of the whole-ship automation system and may cause other packages to begin behaving erratically. Sufficient reprogramming to fix the problem is beyond the resources of this mission.

When AutoEngineer is working correctly – which is most of the time – if can carry out all life support, power and drive functions with an effective skill level of 1. As with other systems, it needs someone with hands to do physical work – the AutoEngineer can regulate the water flow to a shower system but cannot hand the soap to a user.

AUTOGUNNER

The AutoGunner package can operate any or all of the ship's weapons with an effective DM+1. It is an efficient system but suffers from a form of over-helpfulness that could be a liability in a weapons control package. One of AutoGunner's foibles is its habit of offering an auto-lock on almost any target in range. This may be disconcerting as a customs vessel approaches and the gunnery system suddenly asks 'lock weapons on target?' over the shipboard intercom. Playing around with the interface will enable the Travellers to eliminate this trait, more or less. Other than being over-eager to the point where it can seem positively bloodthirsty, AutoGunner works well enough and can be trusted to decide which targets are most urgent, prioritising point defence and protection of the ship over more distant threats.

AUTOPURSER

The AutoPurser part of the package is essentially a financial expert system, which constantly predicts market conditions and trends in nearby systems as well as managing the vessel's internal finances. AutoPurser pays the Travellers every month, exactly on time, and handles docking fees and the like automatically unless someone really wants to intervene. In this role it is entirely competent – its effective skill level of Admin 1 is sufficient for routine tasks never to go wrong.

When acting as a broker or financial planner, AutoPurser has an effective skill level of 1. However, its mode of operation can be modified. The default setting is extremely cautious, prioritising the greatest chance of making some profit – even a tiny one – over calculated risks. This is not a good way to actually make money out of interstellar commerce and the Travellers may decide the system should be a bit less risk-averse. That can raise different problems, since at its most extreme AutoPurser can be a reckless gambler who dreams of the vast payoff if the huge risk turns out to have been worth it. The Travellers will have to experiment with the settings to find a level they are happy with, or simply ignore its advice.

USING AUTOCREW

The Autocrew packages can be used to allow a band of Travellers lacking critical skills to carry out the mission, or add a little personality to the ship. The foibles of AutoGunner and AutoPurser might cause some minor problems and can also be used to distract the Travellers from the gradual breakdown of AutoEngineer. Nothing goes wrong with AutoEngineer for the first five weeks of the mission, after which there is a chance of cascading faults. The Referee should roll 2D on the AutoEngineer Faults table at the beginning of mission week 6 and each week thereafter. The roll begins with no DM but certain events will cause the failure DM to increase. The Referee should keep track of this and apply it to all rolls thereafter.

What is happening is that small mathematical and command errors in AutoEngineer begin to affect other systems that interact with the ship's power and life support equipment. AutoEngineer eventually corrupts their operations to the point where the ship is very difficult to operate. Shutting AutoEngineer off will permit the problems in other systems to be diagnosed and cleared out – taking 2D hours per attempt, and requiring an Average (8+) Electronics (computers) check. It would be unwise to allow a corrupted system to do this automatically.

AutoEngineer cannot be cleared this way. Turning it off and on again will not resolve anything but does create the chance of more problems. Make a new 2D roll to determine the level of issues when the system is turned back on. Travellers may be able to mitigate the problem by bug-hunting. Each session of 1Dx1D hours allows a Difficult (10+) Electronics (computers) check to be made. The failure DM is reduced by the Effect of the check.

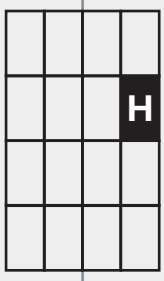
If AutoEngineer is simply switched off, it stops corrupting the other systems but they are all designed to interface with one another. As a result, there will be minor glitches and false alarms on a regular basis, and every time an automated check is made there is a one in six chance it is subject to an effective DM-1 instead of the usual DM+1.

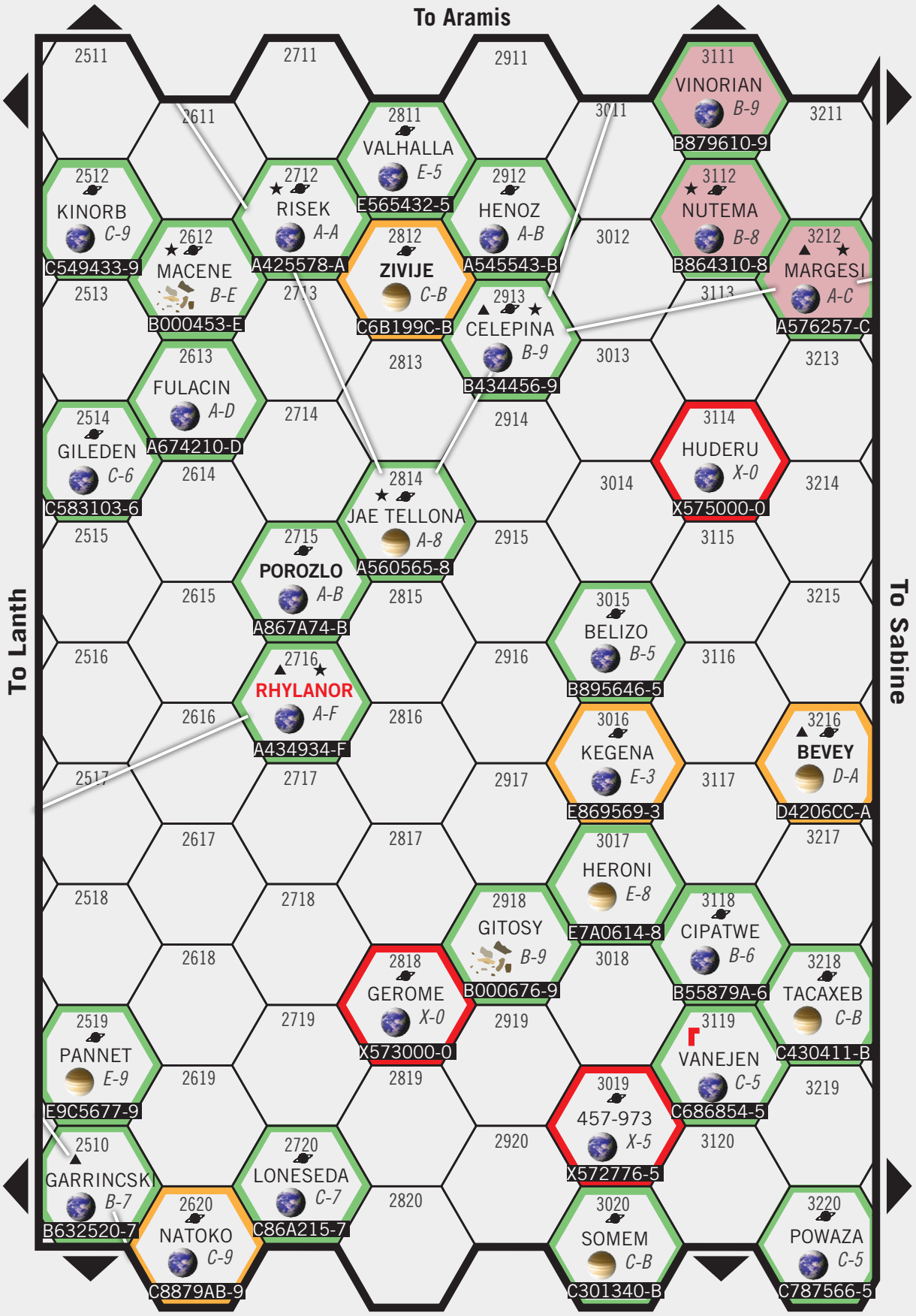
AutoEngineer Faults

2D + DMs	Result
2–4	No discernible problems.
5–7	No discernible problems but cascading mathematical errors begin to add up. Failure DM increases by +1.
8–10	Minor issues in non-critical systems. For example, lights flicker in one chamber or a random galley appliance just stops working for no apparent reason. Alternatively, false alarms indicate serious problems in random systems.
11–13	Minor issues in non-critical systems. Cascading mathematical errors intensify. Failure DM increases by +2.
14–16	Issues with a major system anywhere in the ship for 4D hours. This could be a turret or sensor system, or any other important component. DM-2 applies to all checks associated with this system during the problem, which will be apparent from diagnostics and alarms even if the system is not in use. Failure DM increases by +1.
17–19	Issues with a major system anywhere in the ship for 4Dx4 hours. This could be a turret or sensor system, or any other important component. DM-2 applies to all tasks associated with this system during the problem, which will be apparent from diagnostics and alarms even if the system is not in use. Failure DM increases by +2.
20–22	Issues with an entire segment of the ship (gunnery, bridge, engineering or general systems) for 1Dx1D hours. DM-2 applies to all checks associated with this system during the problem. Failure DM increases by +3.
23–25	Issues with an entire segment of the ship (gunnery, bridge, engineering or general systems) for 2Dx2D hours. DM-3 applies to all checks associated with this system during the problem. Failure DM increases by +4.
26+	All systems aboard ship are malfunctioning and generating false alarms. For any given 2D hour period, a negative DM determined by rolling 1D applies to each of the four main segments (Gunnery, Bridge, Engineering and General). DMs may vary between segments. Failure DM does not increase.

RHYLANOR SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
457-973	3019	—	X572776-5	—	R	Imperium	G
Belizo	3015	—	B895646-5	Ag Ni	—	Imperium	G
Bevey	3216	S	D4209CC-A	De Hi In Na	A	Imperium	G
Celepina	2913	N S	B434456-9	Ni	—	Imperium	G
Cipatwe	3118	—	B55879A-6	Ag	—	Imperium	G
Fulacin	2613	—	A674210-D	Lo An	—	Imperium	—
Garrincski	2520	S	B632520-7	Ni Po	—	Imperium	—
Gerome	2818	—	X573000-0	Ba	R	Imperium	G
Gileden	2514	—	C583103-6	Lo	—	Imperium	G
Gitosy	2918	—	B000676-9	As Na Ni Va	—	Imperium	—
Henoz	2912	—	A545543-B	Ag Ni	—	Imperium	G
Heroni	3017	—	E7A0614-8	Ni	—	Imperium	—
Huderu	3114	—	X575000-0	Ba	R	Imperium	—
Jae Tellona	2814	N	A560565-8	De Ni	—	Imperium	G
Kegena	3016	—	E869569-3	Ni	A	Imperium	G
Kinorb	2512	—	C549433-9	Ni	—	Imperium	G
Loneseda	2720	—	C86A215-7	Lo Wa	—	Imperium	G
Macene	2612	N	B000453-E	As Ni Va	—	Imperium	G
Margesi	3212	N S	A576257-C	Lo	—	Imperium	—
Natoko	2620	—	C8879AB-9	Hi Ga	A	Imperium	G
Nutema	3112	N	B864310-8	Lo	—	Imperium	G
Pannet	2519	—	E9C5677-9	Fl Ni	—	Imperium	G
Porozlo	2715	—	A867A74-B	Hi Ga	—	Imperium	G
Powaza	3220	—	C787566-5	Ag Ni Ga	—	Imperium	G
Rhylanor	2716	N S	A434934-F	Hi	—	Imperium	—
Risek	2712	N	A425579-A	Ni	—	Imperium	G
Somem	3020	—	C301340-B	Ic Lo Va	—	Imperium	G
Tacaxeb	3218	—	C430411-B	De Ni Po	—	Imperium	G
Valhalla	2811	—	E565432-5	Ni	—	Imperium	G
Vanejen	3119	—	C686854-5	Ga Ri	—	Imperium	—
Vinorian	3111	—	B879610-9	Ni	—	Imperium	—
Zivije	2812	—	C6B199C-B	Fl Hi In	A	Imperium	G





Gas Giant
★ Imperial Naval Base
▲ Imperial Scout Base
B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level

Secure System
Amber Zone
Red Zone
Aramis Trace
X-boat Route

Asteroids (no atmosphere/water)
Planet (dry)
Planet (water present)
Research Station
Imperium Border

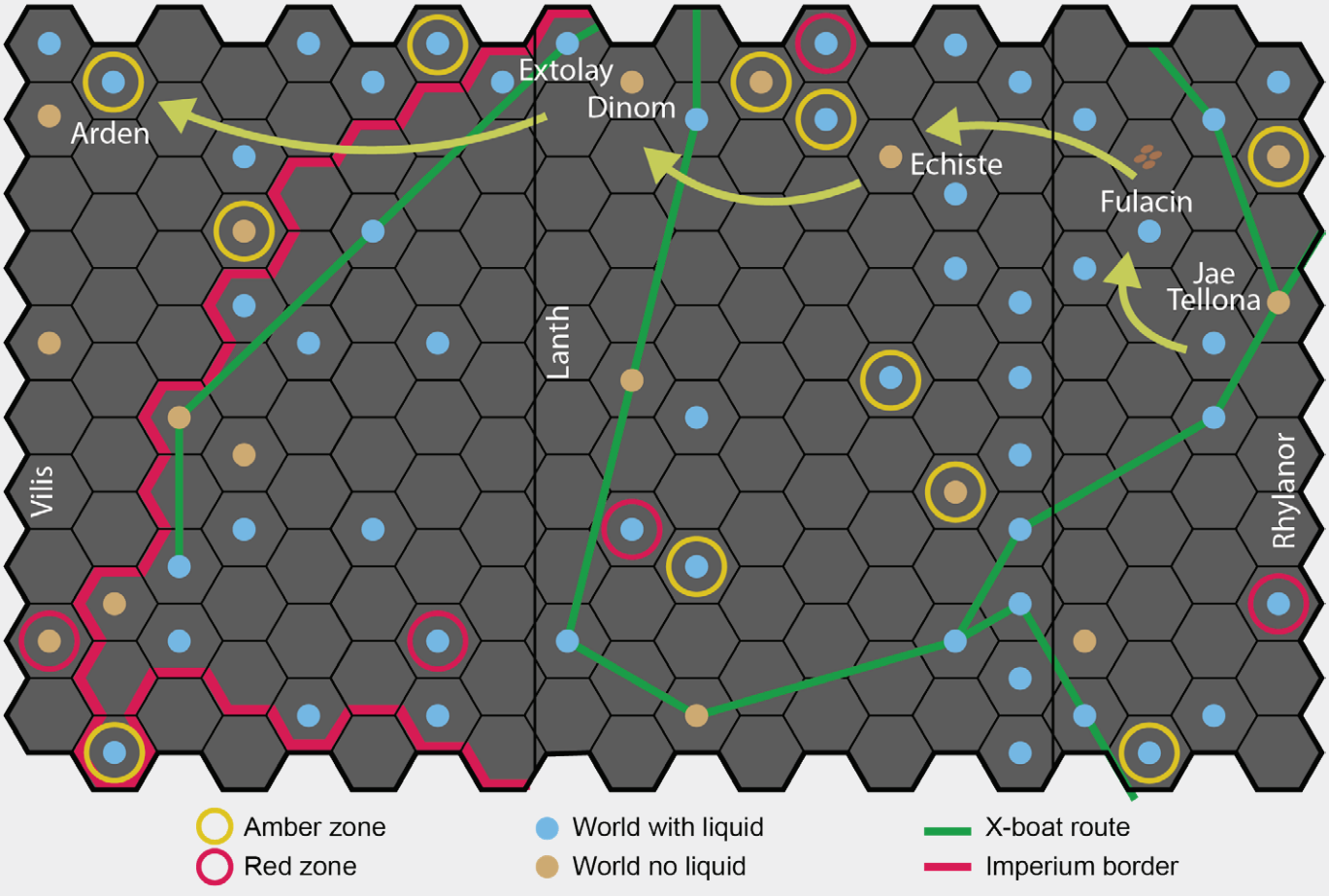
The Rhylanor subsector contains 32 star systems of which 25 are located on one of the arms of the Spinward Main. The subsector is economically powerful and also vital as an easy route for commerce across the coreward end of the Spinward Marches. The majority of this activity is in the coreward end of the subsector, with a jump-2 transit to the rimward end possible by way of Jae Tellona.

The astrographical layout of Rhylanor has significant military and political implications as well as the more obvious economic ones. Not surprisingly, the subsector and its name-world were primary targets for the Zhodani during the four Frontier Wars. There are seven naval bases in the subsector, including the primary sector fleet installation at Macene. Although this has not been granted Depot status it approaches the capabilities of one and is likely to be commissioned as a Depot in the next couple of decades.

Security for the subsector is provided by the 212th Fleet, which is typical for its type. The fleet has a light cruiser as its flagship and a number of modern fleet destroyers but relies mainly on patrol and escort vessels as well as older destroyers. In wartime it might be reinforced with heavy units from the sector fleet but it is generally preferable to keep these concentrated under central command. The in-system defences of major worlds and naval bases contribute greatly to the security of these systems, freeing the subsector fleet to maintain an increased presence in the less well-travelled systems. As a result the Rhylanor-Coreward segment of the Spinward Main is one of the safest trade arteries in the region despite its proximity to the border.

Rhylanor is famous as a battleground but also as the birthplace of Emperor Olav I. After his victory over the Outworld Coalition in the First Frontier War, Olav hault-Plankwell took his fleet to Capital and declared himself Emperor – thereby ushering in the Civil War. This creates a rather controversial figure – Admiral Plankwell is definitely a hero up to the end of the First Frontier War. Thereafter he is seen by many as a righteous figure, offended at the lack of central support for the people of the Marches. Others, particularly those from sectors ravaged by the Civil War, see him as a power-hungry megalomaniac who caused immense destruction and suffering.

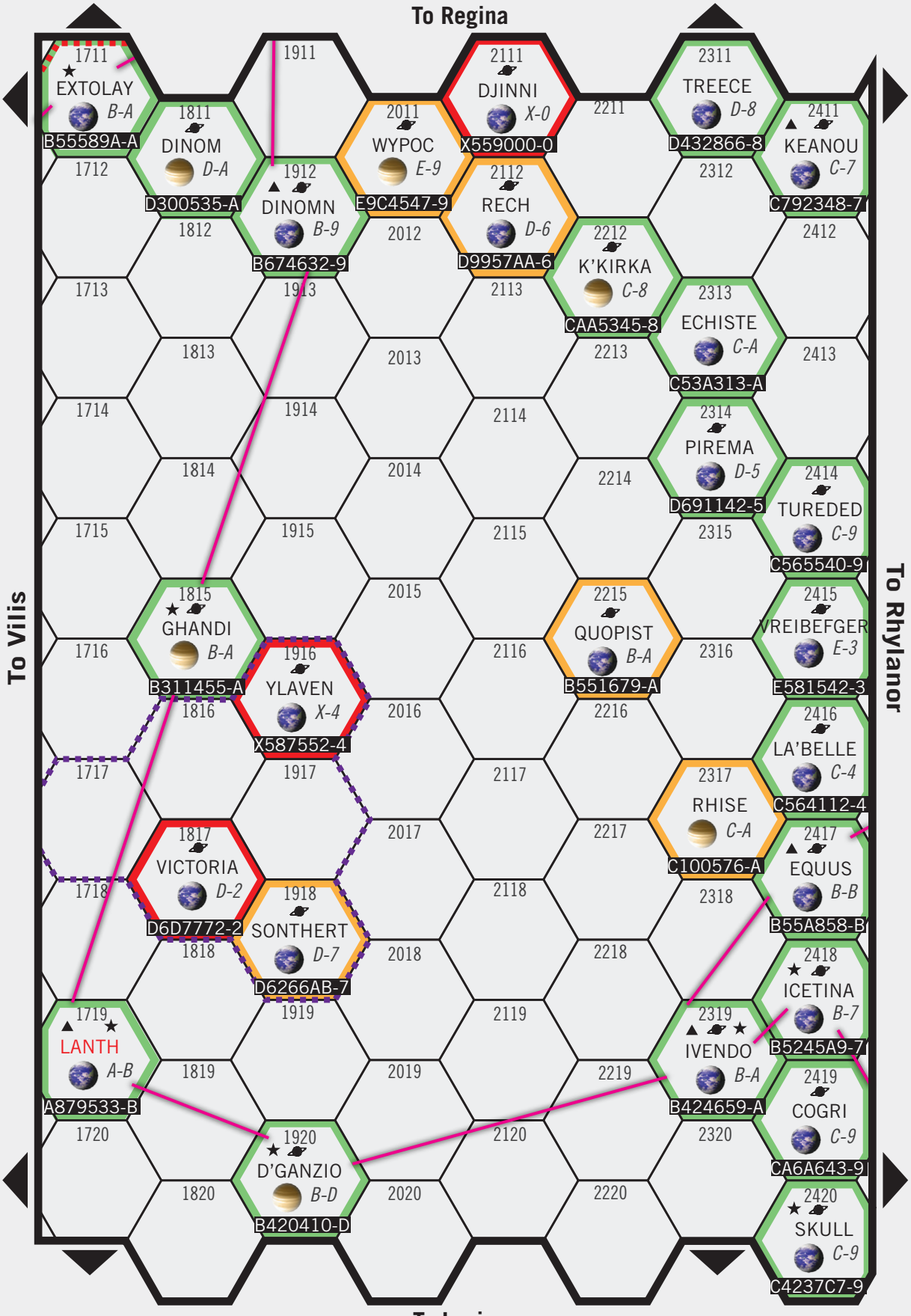
JOURNEY OF THE CREW



LANTH SUBSECTOR

All but six of the 27 star systems in Lanth lie on the Spinward Main or can be reached from it by a jump-2 capable ship. The Jenghe system provides jump-1 access coreward into the Regina subsector, whilst the neighbouring naval base at Extolay is tasked with trans-border security. Relatively little traffic continues spinward along the main, although trade with Arden has picked up in recent years. Most shipping heads coreward, usually terminating at Efate from where a jump-2 network facilitates trade out to the border and beyond.

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Cogri	2419	—	CA6A643-9	Ni Ri Wa	—	Imperium	G
D'Ganzio	1920	N	B420410-D	De Ni Po	—	Imperium	G
Dinom	1811	—	D300535-A	Ni Va	—	Imperium	G
Dinomn	1912	S	B674632-9	Ag Ni	—	Imperium	G
Djinni	2111	—	X559000-0	Ba	R	Imperium	G
Echiste	2313	—	C53A313-A	Lo Wa	—	Imperium	—
Equus	2417	S	B55A858-B	Wa	—	Imperium	G
Extolay	1711	N	B55589A-A	—	—	Imperium	—
Ghandi	1815	N	B311455-A	Ic Ni	—	Imperium	G
Icetina	2418	N	B5245A9-7	Ni	—	Imperium	G
Ivendo	2319	N S	B424659-A	Ni	—	Imperium	G
Keanou	2411	S	C792348-7	He Lo	—	Imperium	G
K'Kirka	2212	—	CAA5345-8	Fl Lo	—	Imperium	G
La'Belle	2416	—	C564112-4	Lo	—	Imperium	G
Lanth	1719	N S	A879533-B	Ni	—	Imperium	—
Pirema	2314	—	D691142-5	He Lo	—	Imperium	G
Quopist	2215	—	B551679-A	Ni Po	A	Imperium	G
Rech	2112	—	D9957AA-6	Ag	A	Imperium	G
Rhise	2317	—	C100576-A	Ni Va	A	Imperium	—
Skull	2420	N	C4237C7-9	Na Po	—	Imperium	G
Sonthert	1918	—	D6266AB-7	Ni	A	Imperium	G
Treece	2311	—	D432866-8	Na Po	—	Imperium	—
Tureded	2414	—	C565540-9	Ag Ni	—	Imperium	G
Victoria	1817	—	D6D7772-2	—	R	Imperium	G
Vreibefger	2415	—	E581542-3	Ni	—	Imperium	G
Wypoc	2011	—	E9C4547-9	Fl Ni	A	Imperium	G
Ylaven	1916	—	X587552-4	Ag Ni	R	Imperium	G


To Regina
To Vilis
To Rhylanor
To Lunion
1711
EXTOLAY
B-A
B55589A-A
1811
DINOM
D-A
D300535-A
1911
1912
DINOMN
B-9
B674632-9
2011
WYPOC
E-9
E9C4547-9
2111
DJINNI
X-0
X559000-0
2112
RECH
D-6
D9957AA-6
2211
2212
K'KIRKA
C-8
CAA5345-8
2311
TREECE
D-8
D432866-8
2313
ECHISTE
C-A
C53A313-A
2314
PIREMA
D-5
D691142-5
2411
KEANOU
C-7
C792348-7
2414
TUREDED
C-9
C565540-9
2415
VREIBEFGER
E-3
E581542-3
2416
LA'BELLE
C-4
C564112-4
2417
EQUUS
B-B
B55A858-B
2418
ICETINA
B-7
B5245A9-7
2419
COGRI
C-9
CA6A643-9
2420
SKULL
C-9
C4237C7-9
1815
GHANDI
B-A
B311455-A
1916
YLAVEN
X-4
X587552-4
1817
VICTORIA
D-2
D6D7772-2
1918
SONTHERT
D-7
D6266AB-7
1719
LANTH
A-B
A879533-B
1920
D'GANZIO
B-D
B420410-D
2215
QUOPIST
B-A
B551679-A
2317
RHISE
C-A
C100576-A
2319
IVENDO
B-A
B424659-A
Gas Giant
Imperial Scout Base
Imperial Naval Base
B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level
Secure System
Amber Zone
Red Zone
X-boat Route
Abyss Rift
Planet (dry)
Planet (water present)
Imperium Border

The Lanth segment of the Spinward Main is well-travelled and generally secure, but that does not always translate to it being safe. The majority of the subsector is very sparse, known colloquially as the Abyss Rift. This region has a bad reputation for misjumps and navigational problems, and whilst the situation is exaggerated by wild spacers' tales the statistics do show a higher incidence of misjump in the region surrounding the rift.

Lanth is politically complex, in that its capital is located in the rimward-spinward corner and requires a jump-4 transit to reach. Thus Lanth itself receives little commercial traffic other than large corporate freighters capable of long jumps. Information and instruction turnaround is at least four weeks for any world on the Spinward Main. This is not usually a problem as regional offices and local officials can take care of routine matters, but does create some tension since help can more quickly be obtained from Regina or Rhylanor than Lanth.

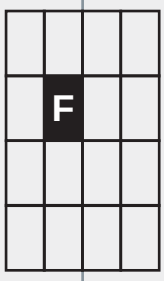
The worlds of Lanth and D'Ganzio, both of which have naval bases, are generally thought of as bastions against Sword Worlds expansion. This is not necessarily military; economic and cultural influences are also considered a threat. A programme of local assistance and trade on generous terms is in place, with a flotilla of jump-2 freighters routinely making the run into Confederation space. It is widely thought that the project is a cover for intelligence gathering and covert operations, which is probably true.

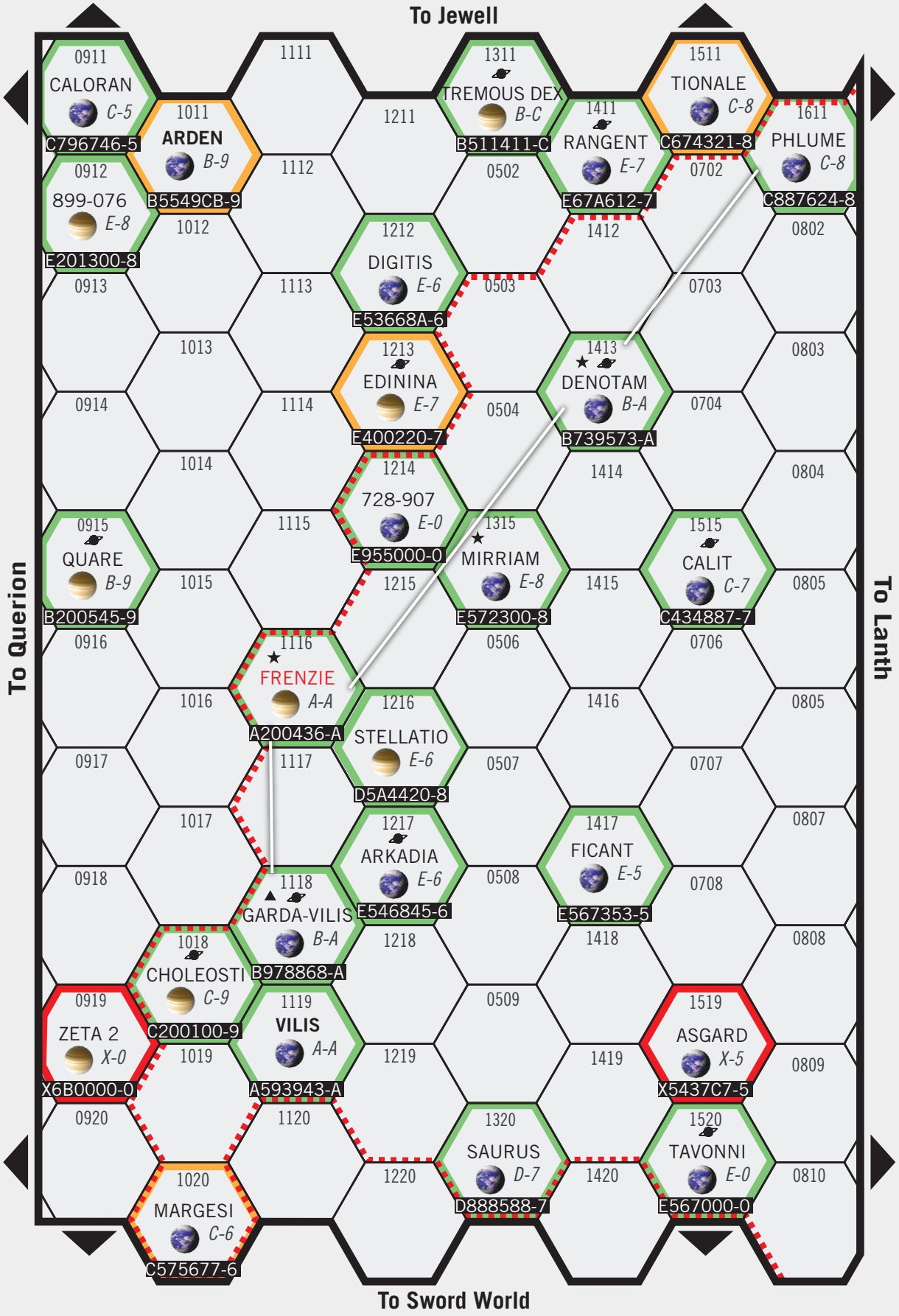
The subsector is at present defended by the 23rd Provisional Fleet, a placeholder designation which has never been superseded. The 23rd Provisional Fleet has its headquarters at Ivendo and possesses a higher proportion of low-jump, small vessels such as patrol corvettes than is usual for such force, although it also boasts a contingent of high-jump 'rift cruisers'. It is unusual for a subsector fleet to have more than one or at most two cruiser-sized units and these are almost always flagships. In this case, the need to operate in the Abyss Rift has made such vessels a necessity.

Lanth and D'Ganzio are 'fortress worlds', intended to hold out for long periods in the event of attack. In addition to their local forces and the non-jump-capable defences for the naval bases, both have a contingent of light and heavy cruisers on deployment from the sector fleet. These are officially there for 'border security and assistance' work but in wartime are likely to be tasked with chasing down Sword Worlds raiders or conducting heavy reconnaissance of the region between Lanth and the Sword Worlds Confederation. In the meantime, they show the flag and remind the nearby world populations that the Imperial Navy's ships are far more advanced than those of the Sword Worlds.

VILIS SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
728-907	1214	—	E955000-0	Ba	—	Imperium	—
899-076	0912	—	E201300-8	Ic Lo Va	—	—	—
Arden	1011	—	B5549CB-9	Hi	A	—	—
Arkadia	1217	—	E546845-6	—	—	Imperium	G
Asgard	1519	—	X5437C7-5	Po	R	Imperium	—
Calit	1515	—	C434887-7	—	—	Imperium	G
Caloran	0911	—	C796746-5	Ag	—	—	—
Choleosti	1018	—	C200100-9	Lo Va	—	Imperium	G
Denotam	1413	N	B739573-A	Ni	—	Imperium	G
Digitis	1212	—	E53668A-6	Ni	—	—	—
Edinina	1213	—	E400220-7	Lo Va	A	Imperium	G
Ficant	1417	—	E567353-5	Lo	—	Imperium	—
Frenzie	1116	N	A200436-A	Ni Va	—	Imperium	—
Garda-Vilis	1118	S	B978868-A	—	—	Imperium	G
Margesi	1020	—	C575677-6	Ag Ni	A	Imperium	—
Mirriam	1315	N	E572300-8	He Lo	—	Imperium	—
Phlume	1611	—	C887624-8	Ag Ni Ga Ri	—	Imperium	—
Quare	0915	—	B200545-9	Ni Va	—	Imperium	G
Rangent	1411	—	E67A612-7	Ni Wa	—	—	G
Saurus	1320	—	D888588-7	Ag Ni	—	Imperium	—
Stellatio	1216	—	D5A4420-8	Fl Ni	—	Imperium	—
Tavonni	1520	—	E567000-0	Ba	—	Imperium	G
Tionale	1511	—	C674321-8	Lo	A	Imperium	—
Tremous Dex	1311	—	B511411-C	Ic Ni	—	—	G
Vilis	1119	—	A593943-A	Hi In	—	Imperium	—
Zeta 2	0919	—	X6B0000-0	Ba	R	—	—


F


To Jewell
To Querion
To Lanth
To Sword World
0911
CALORAN
C-5
C796746-5
1011
ARDEN
B-9
B5549CB-9
1111
1211
1311
TREMOUS DEX
B-C
B511411-C
1411
RANGENT
E-7
E67A612-7
1511
TIONALE
C-8
C674321-8
1611
PHLUME
C-8
C887624-8
0912
899-076
E-8
E201300-8
1012
1112
0502
0702
0802
0913
1113
1212
DIGITIS
E-6
E53668A-6
0503
1412
0703
1013
1213
EDININA
E-7
E400220-7
1413
DENOTAM
B-A
B739573-A
0803
0914
1114
0504
0704
1014
1214
728-907
E-0
E955000-0
1414
0804
0915
QUARE
B-9
B200545-9
1115
1315
MIRRIAM
E-8
E572300-8
1515
CALIT
C-7
C434887-7
1015
1215
1415
0805
0916
0506
0706
1116
FRENZIE
A-A
A200436-A
1016
1216
STELLATIO
E-6
D5A4420-8
1416
0805
0917
1117
0507
0707
1017
1217
ARKADIA
E-6
E546845-6
1417
FICANT
E-5
E567353-5
0807
0918
1118
GARDA-VILIS
B-A
B978868-A
0508
0708
1018
CHOLEOSTI
C-9
C200100-9
1218
1418
0808
0919
ZETA 2
X-0
X6B0000-0
1119
VILIS
A-A
A593943-A
0509
1519
ASGARD
X-5
X5437C7-5
1019
1219
1419
0809
0920
1120
1320
SAURUS
D-7
D888588-7
1520
TAVONNI
E-0
E567000-0
1020
MARGESI
C-6
C575677-6
1220
1420
0810
Gas Giant
Imperial Scout Base
Imperial Naval Base
B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level
Secure System
Amber Zone
Red Zone
X-boat Route
Planet (dry)
Planet (water present)
Imperium Border

The Vilis subsector lies at the spinward edge of the Third Imperium. 16 of its 26 star systems are Imperial members, although most are of relatively low value. The spinward-rimward corner of the subsector borders the Sword Worlds Confederation, whilst the spinward-coreward edge contains part of the demilitarised zone created after the Third Frontier War. This region is influenced by the independent world of Arden, which styles itself the leader of a semi-fictional 'Federation of Arden'.

Strategically and economically, the subsector is not of any great importance. It is considered to be something of a buffer zone and receives relatively little defensive investment – which coupled with astrographical isolation leads to lower levels of commercial and industrial investment as well. Vilis is considered by most strategic planners to be a forward battleground or if necessary a concession that could be given away at the negotiating table in return for keeping something more important.

The flaw in this strategy is that if enough of the Vilis buffer zone is given away, or if Lanth falls to a Sword Worlds advance, hostile ships can be based that much closer to the Spinward Main. 'Fortress Vilis' proponents warn that not caring enough about the subsector could mean losing the vital trade artery and everything it connects to. 'Surrender Vilis and we give away Regina' is a common cry when budgets are under discussion.

Vilis currently does not have a formally designated subsector fleet. This situation is unusual and resulted from the complex treaty agreements made after the end of the Third Frontier War. Security forces are assigned but they have never been allocated Numbered Fleet status. Instead, there are two small area commands based at Frenzie and Mirriam, whilst the naval base at Denotam is intended to house forward-deployed elements of the sector fleet. It is well protected by in-system craft but usually plays host only to a handful of destroyers and light cruisers which show the flag in the demilitarised zone. In wartime the base would be used to stage movements of heavy fleet elements out to spinward against the Zhodani or spinward-rimward against the Sword Worlds.

Naval Security Force Frenzie patrols the rimward-spinward corner of the subsector and makes forays out into the Querion subsector. Most of its vessel allocation is a mix of patrol corvettes and similar low-capability ships and refitted obsolescent destroyers. This is wholly inadequate to resist an invasion but suffices to keep the peace. Naval Security Force Mirriam is even weaker, being tasked mainly with patrolling four near-worthless systems. However, the bases are well defended and would serve as a breakwater for an invading force, or as a staging point for more capable vessels moved up to operate in the enemy's rear.

For many years there have been plans to rationalise the security forces of the sector and either move some of the numbered fleets or redesignate them. However, all such plans have had to struggle against the tide of cross-cutting agendas and more pressing requirements for vessels elsewhere. The usual response is that 'the sector fleet is a courier jump away', which is all very well unless the sector fleet is similarly stretched too thin and dispersed by internal-political requirements.

SETTING UP THE CAMPAIGN

A little preparation is required to set up *Whispers on the Abyss*. This can be worked into an ongoing campaign at some suitable point or dealt with outside the game environment. It is best if each Traveller goes through this process privately. If they then want to reveal their Agenda or affiliations that is up to them. If they want to mislead others or pretend ignorance of the situation they can of course do so.

What the Travellers have in common is that somehow they became aware of an interesting opportunity. A small starship company was offering good money and the chance of a big bonus to take part in a 'showcase cruise' aboard their new starship variant. Crewmembers and business people were obviously needed but others might play a useful part. A highly decorated naval officer might add gravitas to the vessel, whilst a famous actor or rock star would attract media attention.

The deal, in general terms, was simple enough. Each Traveller would receive transportation to Rhylanor Highport, either by liner or by way of vouchers to cover their own ship's expenses. At that point they would take possession of the ship and receive Cr100000 as a hiring bonus. After a couple of days to become familiar with the ship they would set out on a cruise along the Spinward Main, terminating at Arden. The goal is to sell starships. Not just one or two but to generate the sort of orders that will keep a yard busy for years!

The Travellers' role is to impress potential clients at each port of call. In most cases interest has been already generated by way of datanet advertising or paying local representatives to set up meetings. These will be important people, the sort who can authorise multi-Megacredit purchases. The Travellers will show off the ship to them, both directly and by demonstrating excellence in routine operations. Pay will be Cr10000 per month for each member of the mission, with a bonus at the end and the possibility of percentage points on deals the Travellers facilitate.

The money is good, with the potential of a bigger payoff at some point in the future when deals go through and ships are delivered. There are other advantages as well. The Travellers are about to make some important contacts. The sort of people who buy multiple starships are worth knowing. Whether the Travellers simply want the prospect of future employment or they have bigger ambitions, this mission could open doors for them. A Traveller with political ambitions might find a niche with one of the world governments they visit or develop a rapport that leads to support later. Someone with a shadier background might find it useful to make friends among a world government that does not have an extradition treaty with the Imperium. Smart Travellers can get a lot more out of this mission than just a paycheque.

Or is there more to it than that? The Referee needs to determine with each Traveller if they have one or more Agendas (see page 6). Travellers do not need to specify an Agenda if they do not wish to and may change theirs as a result of experience. However, an Agenda gives an indication of what the Traveller wants out of the mission and will help the Referee provide interesting experiences. In some cases Agendas may be due to personal goals but there is also a possibility a Traveller may be working for some outside agency.

Travellers should be presented with the five general motivations – Employee, Expert, Notable, Fake and Plant and asked if any of them apply. The Employee, Expert and Notable Agendas are straightforward and self-explanatory. Fake and Plant might require some additional explanation. Travellers who are Fakes need to decide why they are presenting a false identity or set of competences. This might be a personal reason, like someone wanting to become a media celebrity and trying to 'fake it until you make it'. If so, the Referee is provided with some possible side adventure leads.

If a Traveller is a Plant then who they work for may be important. The Referee can assume the Traveller was approached or volunteered to carry out some undercover work, but that does not mean they necessarily know who is the end client. A Traveller might think they are attempting to learn corporate secrets or sabotage the mission on behalf of another shipping corporation when in fact an Imperial noble is the end client and wants the information to speculate on the stock exchanges.

A Plant who is working for an outside agency may be able to obtain support or information along the way. Travellers may also have the opportunity to effectively become a Plant as their mission evolves. Ultimately they will make their own choices but a client who has placed the Travellers where they can fulfil a role might not be pleased if they choose not to carry out their task. Be that as it may, the possible clients a Plant might be working for could have implications beyond this campaign.

FINGERS IN THE PIE

The Travellers' Agendas, if they have any, may connect them to some of those who are interested in the mission. There are several forces at work here, each of which has its own goals. These are not all mutually contradictory.

RVSC

RVSC, obviously, wants the mission to go ahead as planned and hopes to receive orders for starship conversions. Reports on market conditions and possible advantages to be gained will be very welcome. The company will not acknowledge the existence of the automated intelligence package aboard the prototype, for the very good reason they do not know about it. Almost everyone involved thinks it is part of the Autocrew system. A few technicians were incentivised not to ask too many questions when fitting it, partly by being given a rush job and partly by being paid a fat bonus to just get it done and not talk about it. They think they were just covering someone's mistake; perhaps a manager who messed up the schedule.

In fact, the intelligence package was provided to a regional manager named Davis Levoreen, who accepted a large off-the-books payment to get it placed aboard the prototype. He thinks the money (and the package) came from Imperial Naval Intelligence. He is corrupt and greedy but not a willing traitor to the Imperium. What he does not know is that the package was 'redirected' by personnel working for Sir Armanda Khernadi – who is very much a traitor. She was suborned by the Zhodani intelligence community a few years ago and has been passing minor secrets along ever since. Getting the package and its data into the hands of the Zhodani will be her big proof of loyalty and result in a position of great power when – inevitably and soon, she believes – the Zhodani Consulate overruns everything as far as the Corridor sector.

One or more Travellers may become associated with this operation if they have a suitable Agenda. In all likelihood they will remain ignorant of the real situation until late in the campaign but they may be connected to Davis Levoreen in other ways. He is always looking for ways to make more money, which includes assisting young executives in climbing the corporate ladder in the hope of placing people who owe him a favour in the right jobs. He will also protect those who screw up or are not competent in their position in return for favours and simple bribery is a useful tool as well. Essentially, any Travellers who are involved in shady dealings within RVSC are likely to be connected to Levoreen.

IMPERIAL NAVAL INTELLIGENCE

The INI knows that one of its experimental intelligence gathering and analysis packages is missing but they have no idea it is aboard the R2A4 prototype. A Traveller connected with naval intelligence will probably have a different brief. The INI keeps a close watch on the borders at all times and is concerned about recent developments. War scares are not uncommon and it is a standard tactic to move ships around in a way that elevates concern then withdraw them. That way a real build-up might be mistaken for just another exercise or show of strength. All the same, INI is concerned about recent activities on the part of Zhodani ships and intelligence operatives.

Reports from within the Consulate suggest a slightly elevated rate of warship movements, combined with a drop in detected intrusions and threatening actions along the border. This suggests that either the Zhodani have suddenly become much better at sneaking ships into Imperial space or they are building fewer reconnaissance cruisers. That might be seen as a good thing but it may indicate they want to lower tensions and there are both good and bad reasons why that might happen. The intelligence services want more information, particularly about Zhodani diplomatic and intelligence operations along the spinward frontier. Any attempts to court Arden would be of great interest given its status as a supposedly neutral world where Imperial and Zhodani agencies can do business.

A Traveller connected with the INI will have Commander Alix Jehk as their ultimate point of contact. Commander Jehk is a coordinator of operatives reporting to regional command at Rhylanor. The Traveller will be instructed to watch for signs that the Zhodani Consulate is increasing its influence over Arden and its associated worlds.

GENERAL PRODUCTS

The megacorporation General Products is interested in RVSC and its activities. General would prefer the mission not go very well, since it is competing for the same market share with its new design of armed naval auxiliary/transport. Physical sabotage is not a preferred option but the mission can be undermined in other ways. Small 'mistakes' when demonstrating the ship or 'gaffes' when dealing with local dignitaries may reduce the chances of a successful negotiation.

Passing information to the local representatives of General Products might lead to opportunities to be exploited once the mission has moved on, and will be a goal for any General Products agents planted aboard. General also wants to know about the ship, ideally schematics and detailed system blueprints. These will have to be stolen from the ship's computer. The details of any deals struck will also be useful; perhaps they can be derailed by a better offer.

A Traveller who becomes involved with General Products will be advised about a covert datanet channel which can be used to upload information for the local representative or the next mobile operative to pick up. Direct requests for assistance may or may not produce a response depending on how long the Travellers are in port and what level of presence General Products has.

OTHER PATRONS

A variety of other people have an interest either in the region or in starship procurement. The Travellers might become involved with almost any of them, although for the most part they will simply want information on local conditions and deals in progress. The Travellers may think they are gathering harmless information for someone wanting to use it in a business context when in fact they are feeding data to a terrorist group or an independence movement funded by a foreign power.

One potential contact uses the code-name Silent Observer and is known to pay well for information on a variety of subjects. Silent Observer seems to be an infobroker; someone who will find out whatever the client needs to know in return for a large fee. This is partially true, but the infobrokerage is a cover for intelligence gathering on the part of the Ine Givar, an organisation dedicated to the overthrow of the Imperium. It has agents on many worlds, gathering intelligence and feeding it to their planning committees. Travellers associated with Silent Observer will be given discreet upload channels and paid by credit transfer to a disposable account. They will not deal directly with Silent Observer, which they may correctly assume is an organisation rather than an individual.

RHYLANOR

Rhylanor is one of three worlds comprising the Rhylanor Cluster, just off the Spinward Main. Most traffic in the subsector goes along one or the other arms of that main, with jump-2 ships linking Rhylanor to major trade routes by way of Jae Tellona or Porozlo. Rhylanor's slight disconnection from the trade arteries is not a problem for governmental communications as the world is well served by the x-boat network, but relatively few small private ships come through its port. There is, however, no shortage of shipping in the form of large corporate freighters and jump-2 commercial vessels operated by respectable intermediate shipping lines. It is almost as if Rhylanor thinks itself a bit too good to be hosting beat-up old free traders.

Rhylanor is the innermost planet of its solar system, with a very thin atmosphere. Whilst this does have an oxygen-nitrogen mix it is far too thin to support humans or advanced life of any kind. Surface gravity is rather light, at 0.5G. There is sufficient surface water to support life, but it is very primitive. Much of the surface outside the inhabited cities is covered in multi-cellular growth similar to lichen. There are no native animals and imported species cannot survive outside the controlled climates of the arcologies.

The thin atmosphere means Rhylanor receives considerable amounts of stellar radiation and provides little protection from meteorites. Numerous impact craters have been identified all over the surface, with clusters in some areas. The largest crater is close to the equator and houses a colony of Llellewyloly, a rather strange sentient species normally referred to as Dandelions due to their appearance. Some of the craters have become micro-ecosystems which interest scientists, but since all that has ever been discovered is new kinds of lichen their findings rarely cause much of a stir.

The lichen-covered surface is largely irrelevant to the population of Rhylanor, most of whom never venture outside their cities. These are linked by regular grav vehicle services which operate out of combination space/gravports at each major population centre. It has been observed that on worlds such as this most of the populace tend to forget that there is an outside surface at all, other than when some event reminds them. Most recently this was an ill-fated expedition to climb Mount Whatsit, otherwise known as Zhitar. Flying to the top of a mountain such as Whatsit in a grav vehicle is unremarkable as an achievement but climbing in a pressure suit is a whole other level of challenge. By all accounts the team that made the attempt were experienced and highly competent, and their tragic failure has led to restrictions being placed on already inaccessible regions.

RHYLANOR

Profile	A434934-F	
Starport	A	Excellent
Size	4	6,400km
Atmosphere	3	Very thin
Hydrosphere	4	40%
Population	9	Billions
Government Type	3	Self-Perpetuating Oligarchy
Law Level	4	Light assault weapons prohibited
Technology Level	15	Technical Imperial Maximum

SOCIETY ON RHYLANOR

The people of Rhylanor have much to be proud of and they know it; Rhylanor is the birthplace of Olav hault-Plankwell, victor of the First Frontier War and instigator of the Imperial Civil War. Whilst Plankwell is a controversial figure, Arbellatra Khatami Alkhalikoi is almost universally revered. After victory in the Second Frontier War she brought an end to the Imperial Civil War and established herself as regent. In time she was chosen as Emperor, the first of the current ruling dynasty.

Rhylanor is ruled by a hereditary oligarchy made up of Imperial noble families. Some of these families claim descent from various historical figures, with varying degrees of separation, although some connections are rather tenuous, often by way of someone assumed to be a lover or a distant relative of some member of the Plankwell or Alkhalikoi families. Claims that would be dismissed as over-stretched elsewhere are readily accepted by members of the social elite and those who wish to join it. There is a game to be played in the upper echelons of Rhylanor's society and those who do not play along stand no chance of being accepted.

The population, numbering around eight billion, dwell in large arcologies surrounded by enclosed agricultural lands. These support crops and livestock originating on a great many worlds, although Rhylanor also imports a great deal of food. Quality of life is high and the populace are generally content. Indeed, many would describe them as rather smug. Well-educated and with a strong sense of who they are, the people of Rhylanor are used to controlling processes carried out by robots and machines rather than actually doing the work, and tend to look down on those who have less than they do.

THE STARPORT

Normally a world has one officially designated starport and may have multiple spaceports. Rhylanor, naturally, is an exception. The main port is generally known as Rhylanor Highport and consists of a cluster of multiple controlled-environment segments around a main structure. Many of these segments are permanently set up to provide for the needs of species requiring a different atmosphere composition or pressure, an aquatic environment or whatever else they may need. This part of the installation is unofficially referred to as the 'alien quarter' although the term is discouraged and port employees can be disciplined for using it.

Specialist shuttles are available to take visitors from the landing bays to an area set up for their comfort without moving through the main parts of the station. Whilst convenient this does create segregation and limits interactions, so the station authorities have provided numerous meeting areas that can be set up to allow people to interact face to face through a clear screen of starship-grade material or to don suitable protective equipment and sit down across a real negotiating table.

Other parts of the station are dedicated to agriculture and industry, with a modest system defence presence. This does host a few Imperial Navy vessels but major units are housed at the naval base elsewhere in the system. The highport was constructed to serve as a defensive installation at need, mounting huge batteries of missiles and torpedoes along with a defensive laser armament and several large particle accelerator bays. More commonly, fighters and system defence boats operate from the station, mainly undertaking security and customs work.

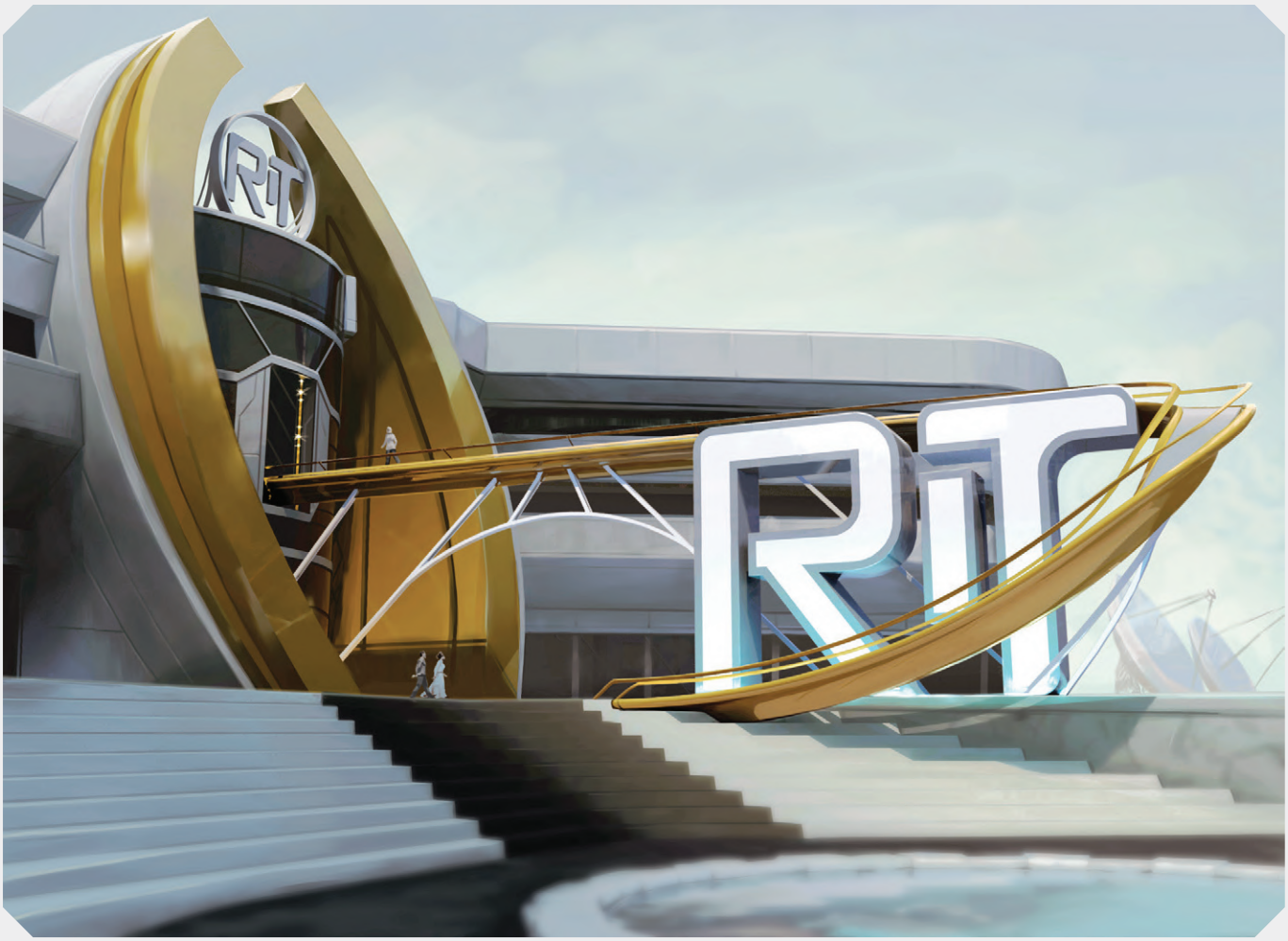
The other orbital port is also officially named Rhylanor Highport. When it was replaced it should have been downgraded to a spaceport but for some reason it was not. Known locally as 'The Old Station' this installation is technically part of the main port, just a detached one, and continues to serve in-system and interstellar traffic. The Old Station is constructed as a double torus, with one wheel serving as a business and habitation centre and the other containing agricultural production areas as well as some minor industrial facilities.

The downport is rather less impressive. It might be considered the 'first among equals' on a world with multiple ports serving its primary cities. Although officially part of the designated starport, Rhylanor Down receives only a little more traffic than the city-spaceports. Its startown is rather shabby, partly due to a lack of investment and partly because the local population consider the downport to be the province of those who are insufficiently important to establish themselves on the highports.

NAVAL BASE AND SHIPYARDS

Rhylanor naval base is the headquarters for the subsector fleet and also hosts a major naval academy. Elements of the sector fleet do visit and the facility is set up to host a major capital ship contingent at need. However, for the most part the base is dedicated to system defence and support of patrol operations in local systems. Much of this activity is to rimward-trailing as systems in other directions either fall under the jurisdiction of the Lanth Subsector Fleet or are more easily secured by ships based out of Risek and Nutema.

The naval base has repair facilities for several cruiser-sized vessels and one or two capital ships, although normally major vessels would be sent to Macene for repair or overhaul. The Rhylanor yards mainly undertake maintenance of subsector fleet vessels and the occasional set of modifications on an



existing vessel. It is widely assumed that some ships coming out of the Rhylanor yards are prototypes or experimental variants, or may be one-off conversions to carry out some specific task.

The Rhylanor naval base does not construct starships, although there are shipyards in the system which are owned by corporations and private concerns. Much of the work they undertake is for the navy, typically rather humble but necessary vessels such as auxiliaries, tankers and supply transports. Freighters and jump-2 commercial ships are also regularly constructed or overhauled at these yards, usually for clients who have pre-ordered a large batch. However, sometimes deals go awry or orders are reduced in which case spare capacity or half-built ships are offered at a discount on the local starship construction market. Rhylanor Highport has a vibrant ship sales and orders sector as a result.

THE RHYLANOR INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

RIT is arguably the foremost university in the sector and certainly presents itself as such. It has a broad base of programmes in most disciplines but specialises in hard science and technological research. A large segment of the population have RIT qualifications from open-learning courses, usually at a pre-degree level. It is possible to study almost anything to bachelor's degree level at RIT, although other universities have better degree and graduate programmes in the humanities and other non-scientific fields.

Some of the research undertaken at RIT is highly classified, with the end client or sponsor kept secret. Usually this sponsor is the Imperium itself or one of the megacorporations and it is entirely possible that there are two or even more projects researching the same subject for different clients. The university maintains a number of research starships and installations, typically on remote outsystem bodies in other star systems.

THE GREAT GATES OF RHYLANOR

The campaign opens on the world of Rhylanor, one of the most famous in the Spinward Marches. Many citizens of distant star systems believe that Rhylanor is the capital of the sector, some because it is the only place they have heard of in the region and some due to the efforts of those who believe their homeworld really *should* be the local capital.

The default opening is that the Travellers are arriving to begin their mission for RVSC. If they have a ship of their own it will be looked after by the company in their absence and given annual maintenance for free. When the mission terminates RVSC will either pay for liner passage back to Rhylanor or deliver the Travellers' ship to a destination of their choice. There is a possibility they may be permitted to keep the prototype if they perform particularly well.

ARRIVING AT RHYLANOR

The Travellers will arrive at the orbital starport – probably but not necessarily the modern one. There, they are to be met by a representative of the company. If the Travellers do not already know one another they may be arriving from different systems and might not be aboard the same ship. The Referee might decide that some of the Travellers have been at the port for a few days and that ships carrying the others arrive at different times over a period of a few hours or even days. The level of detail is very much up to the Referee. If some Travellers are already present they will be able to explore the highport, do some shopping, or whatever else they feel like. The adventure begins when they have all arrived.

The designated RVSC representative is Stannen Vaanaii, who greets the Travellers and hosts a fairly typical meet-and-greet. Joachim and Maninra are present and will be introduced. The atmosphere is intended to be relaxed, with wine and light refreshments. Everyone is encouraged to introduce themselves with a short statement of their background and any notable achievements. Travellers should not reveal their Agenda if they have one but can of course make statements that suggest they have a particular Agenda if it suits their purposes.

Once everyone is introduced the socialising gives way to a briefing and allocation of tasks. A set of very well created holographic images showcase the R2A4, progressing from its humble origins as a broken-down old Type R subsidised merchant to its sleek new look as a fast and elegant vessel to rival anything the megacorporations can field. Internal and optional features are mentioned, and the Travellers have the opportunity to agree which they want. It can be assumed they expressed their preferences in advance and the conversion yard has already implemented them.

DORSAL BULGE: Missile Battery, Accommodation Suite or Secure Accommodation Block?

MAIN CARGO AREA: Retain as cargo hold or fit Internal Accommodation Unit (reduces cargo capacity by 40 tons)?

FORWARD SECURE CARGO AREA: Retain as cargo or convert to vehicle garage or hospitality suite (both reduce cargo capacity by 20 tons)?

The Travellers are reminded that this is not a commercial cargo-hauler any more. It is a showcase, a technology demonstrator and money is to be made from obtaining orders for additional vessels rather than carrying stuff from one port to another. They have the chance to tailor the ship to whatever market sector they intend to target. The secure cargo areas are not a secret from the crew, although they do not appear on publicly available schematics of the vessel. Stannen is happy to discuss everything about the ship and the mission. They do not, however, know about the secret intelligence package.

Next, the Travellers will need to decide who is assigned to which positions aboard ship. Stannen is in overall charge of the mission but the ship will need people assigned to certain roles. The Autocrew system can cover most or perhaps all positions but there is a need to identify who has primary responsibility for those tasks. For example, the ship needs a designated chief engineer whose commands override those of other crewmembers in all areas of engineering responsibility. This person should be a qualified starship engineer but if no-one with the right skills is available a designated person can run the relevant systems using AutoEngineer.

The vessel will need the following:

MASTER: This person takes responsibility for commanding the ship and answers for everything the crew (including the automated systems) do in the course of the mission.

ASTROGATOR: This person is responsible for navigating the ship through normal and jumpspace, and bears specific responsibility for matters relating to the ship's course and position.

PILOT: This person is responsible for manoeuvres the ship makes whether or not an automated system is in actual control.

CHIEF ENGINEER: This person is responsible for ensuring the drives, life support and power systems are functioning correctly.

GUNNERY OFFICER: This person is responsible for weapons systems and their use.

PURSER: This person is responsible for ensuring the ship is properly supplied and that accurate accounts are kept.

Everyone is being paid the same, so it might seem there is no incentive to take on responsibility. However, performance in a command role will be used to determine how bonuses are allocated. Command personnel ideally should have relevant skills but even if they do not they are still responsible for everything in their department. Most of the time that means checking the Autocrew is doing its job properly and giving it suitable commands. If they want, the Travellers could actually fly the ship themselves but – as far as is apparent at this point – the ship could carry out the mission automatically. A single Traveller can take responsibility for all positions if necessary. This might be a big job but credit would not have to be shared.

DOWN TO KIKHIMAA CITY

The regional conversion yard for RVSC is close to the city of Kikhimaa, an arcology with its own small spaceport. A shuttle has been provided for the Travellers' use, along with a pilot and a steward to serve refreshments on the short flight. Leaving the orbital port, the Travellers will be struck by just how dull Rhylanor looks from orbit. The brownish-grey mats of lichen that cover its surface reflect little light, creating a monotonous landscape punctuated by mountain ranges and small seas.

There is a lot of traffic around the port but relatively little moving planetside, making the landing approach very simple. The only complication is a regulation against overflying the city or heading directly towards it. Instead the shuttle must follow a curving path such that it is never in a situation where drive failure could cause it to impact the arcology. This is not an unusual requirement.

The yards are an impressive sprawl on the far side of the port from the city, with individual semi-underground work cells covered by a retractable shield. Normally, these are kept closed but as the Travellers approach they will see that many are open. Some pads are empty, others house half-dismantled ships – a mix of free traders and subsidised merchants for the most part but also some small craft and a patrol corvette – and a few showcase the gleaming forms of completed vessels. It is obvious that RVSC is putting on a show.

The shuttle lands directly at the installation rather than the starport, neatly dropping into a work cell that could house a dismantled 600-ton vessel. Once the shield slides closed overhead the cell is purged with compressed gas and a safe atmosphere is pumped in. The process takes just a few minutes, after which the Travellers can disembark. Exiting the work cell takes them into a utilitarian personnel corridor.

If the Travellers think to ask, Stannen tells them that a network of tunnels run under the complex and are used to convey parts using a high-speed grav-levitation transit system. Personnel only go in these tunnels for maintenance; the rest of the time the system is automated. The access corridors at just below ground level are for people and light robots. Stannen will show the Travellers a work in progress if they want; a free trader being brought back from the very brink of the scrap heap. Like many others, it was bought cheaply after being condemned as a hazard to navigation. When work is completed the vessel will be offered for sale on the open market at an attractive price. The vessel is named *Adumza* and her history can be traced if the Travellers want to do so. There is nothing untoward about her past; *Adumza* is simply an old ship worn out by poor maintenance and overwork.

The Travellers are free to look around for a while but at some point they need to take possession of the ship. It stands ready, with gleaming paintwork and bright metal, looking like a brand new ship. The lines of the old Type R it was are identifiable but this is a sleek and business-like vessel. The personnel hatches stand open and in front of them is a well-groomed human in the dress uniform of an RVSC executive. Stannen introduces him as Davis Levoreen, a regional manager

who has overseen the creation of the prototype. He is accompanied by an adminbot; essentially a self-propelled desk and portacomp terminal.

Levoreen greets the Travellers in a professionally friendly manner and welcomes them to the project. He says he cannot remember exactly who came up with the idea – but says it in a manner that suggests he is being modest. Whoever's brainchild it was, here is the result. A broken-down old Type R reborn as a travelling showroom to sell starships. Rebuilt and refurbished, on time and under budget. She is ready to fly; all she needs is a name.

The Travellers have been given the honour of naming the ship. Silly or rude names will be rejected as the vessel has to maintain a professional appearance but other than that the Travellers can decide on whatever they like. After the name is entered by way of the adminbot it appears on the digital nameplates all over the ship and the status indicator next to the name on the portacomp display switches to 'ACTIVE'. The Travellers may or may not be moved but for at least some of those present it is a profound moment. The prototype was ready for operations a moment ago but now it is *alive*.

Davis Levoreen asks each Traveller to identify themselves to the adminbot, which takes the usual biometrics and cross-references them with planetary and interstellar databases. It then issues each Traveller with two identicards. Most of the time the ship will recognise individuals but these are required to set up a given person as a crewmember, mission personnel or someone with command responsibility. This done, the Travellers are ready to board their ship.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The Travellers will need to proceed to the bridge in order to log in as crew. Until they are on the ship's system they must physically use their identicard to open secure doors or activate functions. This can be a faff, since the card must be presented close to the reader which then requires a verbal identification and a biometric scan. Passenger status can be conferred at the entry points but crew or mission personnel – anyone with access to secure spaces like the bridge or engineering chambers, or who can give orders to the Autocrew system – can only be logged on to the system in the command chamber.

As they proceed through the ship, the Travellers will get an impression of understated quality. There is nothing ostentatious about the vessel; instead it has an air of professionalism and reliability. Trying out appliances or systems will confirm this impression – the ship has been very well put together with attention to the details. The crew-recognition system is straightforward enough but requires the crewmember to be physically present on the bridge and the system set to 'open' by someone with command level access. This was Davis Levoreen, as the Travellers can see. Once they close the system down only one of the newly recognised command personnel or the mission leader – Stannen – can open it up again to accept new crewmembers. Anyone else can be designated a passenger or go through the whole identification rigmarole every time they need to open a door.

Initial exploration of the ship's systems indicates they are functioning at or above required standards. It is standard practice for a new crew to run diagnostics and ground tests on all systems even if someone else has just finished doing the same. Apart from being a requirement under interstellar law it is simple common sense to test a ship before trying to fly it. Standard tests and diagnostics can be performed in a few hours, which will give the Travellers a chance to familiarise themselves with the ship and establish working practices as a crew. Once this is done, they can begin their mission.

TRIALS WITHOUT TRIBULATIONS

The Travellers are expected to carry out standard trials before setting out. Systems are powered up and down, run above and below their normal settings and with everything switched on then with different combinations of systems and accessories off. The intent is to find any last bugs in the system and test for unexpected interactions between unrelated systems. Everyone knows the story of how a little-used galley appliance caused an expensive liner to misjump, although nobody can find any corroborating evidence.

The Travellers could be lazy about the trials, merely ordering the Autocrew to go through the motions. Testing Autocrew is part of the trials but the Travellers should be more involved if they are doing their jobs properly. The Referee should ask for a Difficult (10+) check in each relevant area: Pilot, Electronics (sensors), Astrogator, Engineer and Mechanic. These checks are not to perform operations and manoeuvres but to determine if the Traveller can spot any problems that may exist. Any number of Travellers can make each check and alternate skills can be used if the Travellers are inventive. For example, during flight systems tests someone with no piloting experience could watch the data systems and avionics for irregularities using Electronics (computers).

The prototype performs almost flawlessly, exceeding expectations in most areas. There are always a few things to fine-tune on a new ship but even this is as straightforward as could be hoped. The Travellers may be aware that a previous test crew did all of this and did it meticulously, as part of the process of creating a showcase vessel. The outcome should not be unexpected, although the Travellers may be suspicious that the ship is a little too good. There is nothing to suggest there is anything awry here and indeed there is not. Skilled people did their absolute best and were given time to do it properly. This is a great ship, in perfect working order.

During the trials period the Travellers will range across the system. Approaching the naval base is not permitted of course but they can get close enough to detect some of the activity going on there. The battle tenders *Shirgiir* and *Sargaan* are exercising their battle rider squadrons before redeploying. This is a rather controversial move; not a year ago the navy announced it was increasing the defences of 'fortress Rhylanor' to deter Zhodani aggression. Now, and according to rumour as a result of internal political pressure, these powerful vessels are moving elsewhere. The navy does not comment on deployments, nor does it answer questions about them, but the datanets have been full of a 'debate' – clash is a better word – between nobles friendly with the Duchess of Mora and exponents of other strategies.

Nobody is giving straight answers but the rumour mill says that one entire squadron of battle riders is to be stationed over Trin with the other dispersed at worlds represented by the Duchess' friends. This translates to populations feeling safe and being confident that their noble representative can get things done for them, which in turn leads to popularity and opportunities. Meanwhile the frontier is being weakened again, say opponents of the Duchess. Conventional wisdom states that the Duchess of Mora is making a bid to be named as sector duke and is both demonstrating her influence and buying support by browbeating the sector admiral into repositioning the fleet where she wants it.

There are other warships about. The heavy cruiser *Khishaa* lazily changes course towards the Travellers' ship, her commanding officer extending compliments and courtesies and respectfully reminding the Travellers they are close to restricted space. The iron fist enclosed by this velvet glove is open about her identity and power, whilst the capital ships beyond are secretive. The Travellers can detect a fleet carrier and a group of cruisers in the distance, with battleships nearby. Their transponders do not return an identity however; they merely show as 'Imperial Navy Warship' with a warning to stay outside the vessel's security zone.

With trials complete the Travellers are ready to set off on their mission. First destination will be Jae Tellona, where a demonstration has been arranged for a group of potential clients. The Travellers have a week in jump to plan how they want to go about this, or they may be more inclined to just wing it. Stannen will try to push for some kind of planning but they are not confident enough in the role of mission leader to order Travellers to get their act together.

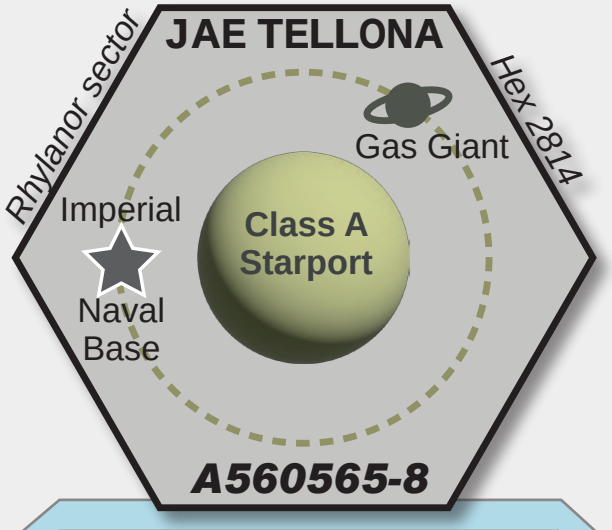
JAE TELLONA

Jae Tellona is significant mainly for its position, providing as it does a jump-2 link between the rimward arm of the Spinward Main at Belizo and the coreward arm at Fulacin, Zivije or Celepina. A number of small starship lines operate out of its port solely to provide a service between these worlds. Once on the Spinward Main or in the Rhylanor Cluster it is more economical to transfer to a jump-1 ship unless the cargo is urgent. For this reason the Jae Tellona Highport is the heart of a micro-economy based on interstellar trade rather than industry. Little of the profit from this activity benefits the planetary population.

Jae Tellona is a harsh desert world with no free-standing water. Its steep axial tilt means that whilst a local day is about 36 hours long at mid latitudes, the polar regions have a night/day cycle over two standard years long. This is not of great importance to the population as the majority live underground. There is little native life above the single-cell level, although what there is tends to be extremely hardy. This is not just due to the dry and hot conditions; Jae Tellona has an extremely strong magnetic field which causes spectacular aurorae in the polar regions due to ionisation of the atmosphere. The effect is sufficiently strong as to interfere with electronic and gravitic equipment and is not conducive to the development of life.

The dominant life on Jae Tellona takes the form of carpets of algae and a variety of primitive insectoid creatures that feed off them. The algal carpets are capable of changing position, albeit very slowly, creeping across the surface at a rate of up to 10 kilometres per week. None of these creatures or the algae themselves are edible to humans but some produce useful biochemical compounds. A number of scientific expeditions are in progress on various parts of Jae Tellona to learn more about the possible uses of these compounds.

The population of Jae Tellona mostly dwell in two polar cities, each with its own downport, and in small mining settlements scattered across the globe. Landings can be tricky due to ionisation interference, and are sometimes curtailed entirely when the 'aurora report' indicates particularly difficult conditions. Both cities, and the rest of the planet in theory at least, are governed by the Imperial megacorporation Sternmetal Horizons with oversight from the Imperial Navy.



JAE TELLONA

Profile	A560565-8	
Starport	A	Excellent
Size	5	8,000km
Atmosphere	6	Standard
Hydrosphere	0	Desert World
Population	5	Hundreds of thousands
Government Type	6	Captive Government/ Colony
Law Level	5	Personal concealable weapons prohibited
Technology Level	8	Quality Computers

The world has little industry of its own other than what is needed for maintenance of the settlements and mining installations. Its exports are mostly metal ores, of which most are basic types that command a low price. A few high-value deposits exist, and independent prospectors sometimes stumble across a gem bed or similar lucky find, but for the most part Jae Tellona is a source of raw materials to be turned into wealth elsewhere. Miners make a decent wage and spend it in the cities but the population is not large enough to generate meaningful amounts of wealth that can be invested in developing the world as a place to live – even if Sternmetal Horizons wanted to do so.

CORSAIRS AND COMPETITORS

The early part of the Travellers' voyage is determined by their jump-2 range. A transit by way of Jae Tellona is the quickest route onto the Spinward Main and the beginning of the mission proper. Despite its Class A starport and naval base, Jae Tellona is something of a backwater; a place to pass through rather than visit. That does not mean there is no profit nor adventure to be had there.

ARRIVING AT JAE TELLONA

Upon emerging from jump at Jae Tellona, the Travellers' instruments quickly confirm they are in the right place. Traffic signals from the orbital port offer a slot in the busy arrivals schedule and advise against causing irregularities. A helpful list of fines for non-compliance pops up as 'additional information'. At the same time an automated signal from the small naval base advises against attempting to approach.

The naval base appears to have a complement of patrol vessels present and only two significant warships. One is not unexpected; the fleet destroyer *Hammond*. If anyone cares to check, the vessel was named for a Second Imperium commodore of no great reputation. There are a lot of fleet destroyers and not all of them can have dramatic names. The other ship is unusual. She is the *Theide*, a Denisov battlecruiser of the Sword Worlds Confederation Navy. Her presence is noteworthy; goodwill visits are sometimes undertaken but to see a capital ship so far inside the Imperium suggests something is afoot.

The Travellers will soon find out why. The newsfeeds are full of stories about the capture of a notorious Vargr corsair group's command staff. They are due to go on trial at Jae Tellona naval base in the next few days, facing the death penalty on charges of piracy. The commander of the Sword Worlds ship, Kapiten im Raum (this translates roughly as 'Captain in Space') Svan Borressen, is present to testify in their defence. The newsfeeds are divided on this; most object that it is none of the Sword Worlds' business what the Imperium does with pirates, whilst some cite the opportunity for closer links with the Confederation or push the line that everyone deserves a good defence. The presence of outsiders just reinforces the Imperial commitment to fairness and justice for all.

In the meantime, it is obvious that there is a lot of activity in the system. Most of it is local traffic moving around the cluster or operating on the Spinward Main feeder routes. There are some big freighters moving in and out of the highport's large-ship docks – they always get priority on docking approaches due to their size and momentum. The highport's shipyards also seem very busy, along with the local supply lanes bringing components and personnel to them. Of particular note is a new expansion to one of the yards, which is still ongoing despite there being ships under construction there.

The Travellers could of course just let Autocrew handle the whole docking process. It is quite capable of liaising with traffic control and complying with instructions. Indeed, it might be a useful test of the system or a chance to show off what the ship's automated systems can do. An Average (8+) Pilot check is required to make a suitable approach and dock smoothly. Whether the Travellers or the AutoBridge system does it, there are interested eyes on them as they begin their approach.

Not everything goes as smoothly as the Travellers would like. Their instruments inform them that another ship is on a course that could bring it dangerously close. The vessel is a 600-ton starship, noted as being an Argacan multipurpose ship named *Prime Example*. If the Travellers want to know more the information in the Library Data entry on page 121 should be made available. More data will require some investigation.

The Argacan has changed course rather suddenly, creating a danger of collision. This should be an infraction but for some reason traffic control is completely ignoring the situation. The Argacan does not respond to communications at first, creating a situation in which the Travellers must respond without information. At this point the AutoGunner starts asking if the Travellers want to lock weapons on the other vessel and AutoBridge indicates it intends to alter course in a few seconds. This is the safe and responsible option but will result in the Travellers losing their approach slot and being given a new one in nearly two hours' time.

The starport finally responds; an automated voice transmission that informs the Travellers they are in violation of traffic regulations. Failure to take evasive

action will result in their vessel being detained for investigation and a heavy fine imposed. The port's only response to protests is to repeat the whole spiel. There is a reason for this: *Prime Example* is a General Products vessel, directly operated by the corporation, and General has a 'special relationship' with the port authority. Its ships get priority in pretty much everything and in the case where there is doubt as to which vessel has right of way, the traffic control system will always side with General Products.

The upshot of this situation is that if the Travellers collide with the General Products vessel – even if it is blatantly the fault of *Prime Example* – they will be held responsible. Likewise, if they refuse to yield they will be held liable for financial losses due to *Prime Example* having to reschedule docking. This is entirely unfair but this is the world of corporate favouritism. It should be obvious to the Travellers that shooting at the other ship is not an option. At the very least they would be detained for weeks awaiting trial on charges as serious as General Products can come up with, possibly facing incarceration or loss of licenses as well as huge fines.

One way around the problem is to convince the port authority to honour the Travellers' right of way since they are on an assigned docking approach. This will not be easy, since the port authority is heavily biased. A difficult (10+) Advocate check will suffice providing the Traveller can come up with some convincing-sounding legal arguments or a scenario in which General has to deal with a lawsuit which will keep *Prime Example* entangled for a while.

The other good option is piloting finesse. The General Products crew think they are dealing with a tubby Type R, 1G acceleration and all that. They do not realise how much thrust the Travellers have to play with. It would be possible to avoid a collision without going so far off vector that the Travellers lose their docking assignment and without getting so close to *Prime Example* that a traffic control infraction is incurred.

The plot, or whoever is instructing AutoBridge, must make a Very Difficult (12+) Pilot check to pull off this manoeuvre. However, they gain DM+4 for the ship's thrust on top of their own Pilot skill. Failure indicates infractions are incurred rather than a collision occurring, though on a straight double-1 the other ship has to make an emergency manoeuvre to avoid one.

Once they are able to dock, the Travellers can proceed through the usual customs and security checks and make their way to the Hotel Imperial Jae Tellona, known locally as 'The Imperial'. This is not quite as prestigious as the chain's name suggests but it is a high-quality business hotel with meeting and conferencing facilities. Stannen is comfortable with

Manoeuvre Outcomes

Check Result	Outcome
Natural 2	*Prime Example* makes a violent manoeuvre to avoid a collision. The Travellers will be arrested for causing a hazard to navigation. Investigation takes 1D days and inevitably results in a guilty verdict. RVSC is fined MCr2D and will take disciplinary action against the Travellers when it can. The footage is used to discredit their efforts to sell this vessel, so DM-4 applies on all sales interactions if General Products has any opportunity to make the client aware of this incident. This outcome is in addition to any others that might apply.
Effect -6 to -4	The Travellers narrowly avert a collision with a wild manoeuvre that throws them way off their approach vector. The Travellers face a delay of 4D+30 minutes and the ship is fined Cr10000x2D. This is paid automatically by the AutoPurser and the Travellers may face disciplinary action at some point. More importantly, General Products will use the footage to embarrass RVSC, imposing DM-2 on attempts to market or sell the vessel unless there is no chance the Travellers' gaffe is known.
Effect -3 to -1	The Travellers avert a collision with a clumsy manoeuvre and lose their assigned docking slot. They are delayed by 2D+15 minutes and the ship is fined Cr1000x2D. General Products uses the footage to embarrass RVSC, imposing DM-1 on efforts to sell the ship wherever the footage has been seen.
Effect 0	The Travellers avert a collision and retain their docking slot but their ham-fisted flying fails to impress potential clients. DM-1 applies to attempts to sell the ship at Jae Tellona only.
Effect 1–3	The Travellers avoid a collision in a smooth and professional manner.
Effect 4–6	The Travellers avoid a collision in a manner that shows off the agility of their ship. DM+1 applies to attempts to sell the ship here at Jae Tellona.

such places due to the circles an RVSC manager moves in and will remind Travellers if necessary that discretion and decorum are expected.

The Travellers have a meeting scheduled for two days' time, with some local representatives of small shipping lines. In the meantime they can do more or less as they like. The AutoPurser aboard their ship will take care of reasonable expenses. In this case 'reasonable' is relatively extravagant. People selling starships are expected to behave in a certain manner and frugality can create the wrong impression. Therefore it is acceptable for them to eat in the best restaurants or buy trinkets in upmarket shops at the company's expense. This is not a license to waste money however; a Traveller who buys a piece of nice jewellery either for their own use or as a present is presenting the right lifestyle and the expense will be approved. Trying to buy six luxury grav cars or a dozen new guns is not considered acceptable. Common sense applies here – a set of several sporting shotguns might be a legitimate 'lifestyle' or 'facilitation' purchase – the latter refers to items used as social tools to gain access to an elite group, in this case by going shooting with them.

INVESTIGATING GENERAL PRODUCTS

If the Travellers choose to investigate General Products and the behaviour of its personnel, some information is immediately available. General bought a small shipyard a few years ago and have expanded it greatly ever since. The megacorporation has obviously poured money into the project. It is common knowledge that this sort of thing buys a lot of influence; secondary industries become dependent on the big money and officials want to keep the megacorporation happy. This can lead to the present situation, where the megacorporation automatically receives preferential treatment and can quickly gain control of a situation by means of influence or more underhand methods.

ASKING AROUND

Travellers who do a bit of old-fashioned asking around will find there are two different attitudes to General Products locally. Those who have benefited from the influx of funding have nothing bad to say even if they are thinking something different. However, there are plenty of people who have lost out or feel they have been mistreated by the megacorporation and its new lackeys. Small businesses in particular have suffered since corporate buyers want low, low prices and are intolerant of problems no matter who caused them. Others have been subject to the same treatment as the Travellers got on docking approach and resent the situation.

There is no solid indication of criminality on the part of General Products, just hard business practice and exploitation of a favourable situation. However, this does not mean there is no resentment and therefore people willing to point fingers and make allegations. Most of these are specific to an individual or a business that has lost out and may not be useful to the Travellers. Collecting enough opinions to be useful will require talking to a lot of people and finding some who are willing to tell their full story.

An Average (8+) Streetwise check will enable the Travellers to put together a picture of the situation at ground level: General Products has clearly dumped a great deal of money into the Jae Tellona operation and has been particularly blatant in using its money to win legal but morally questionable victories over its opponents. Multiple Travellers can make this attempt and a combined Effect of 4+ produces additional information.

Apparently, General Products invested a lot of money in its shipyard at Jae Tellona around 1070–80, setting up a specialist production facility for the Kinunir vanguard or colonial cruiser. This was either a reckless investment or the megacorporation knew something others did not, because at the time orders were small for the new design. In the event, even the short run originally ordered was curtailed and the design largely forgotten about. A few years ago General began throwing money around, converting the production facility to build other designs and greatly expanding it. Again, this investment seems based on insider knowledge, or else General Products are just keen on wasting money.

SEARCHING THE RECORDS

Raking through old datanet entries and news reports is a time-consuming business but Travellers willing to put in a day or so may make an Average (8+) Investigate check. Success results in a pieced-together picture of heavy investment much like that indicated by hearsay, with some additional information. General Products is as secretive as other megacorporations about its dealings, making press releases as it suits the firm's agenda. These mostly trumpet how many jobs have been created or how the new designs coming out of the local yards will revolutionise transportation in the region.

Among all of this are notes on transactions with former suppliers of components for the ill-fated Kinunir. The volume of production from the Jae Tellona yards does

not match the materials going in. The discrepancy is not large; around 5-6,000 tons of shipping over the past three years. That would equate to four or maybe five vessels of the Kinunir built on the quiet. These is nothing illicit about that; General Products might be trying to relaunch the class and creating demonstration vessels, or they may have orders from a client who wants a version of those ships for some reason.

An Effect of 4+ on the Investigate check (this can come from more than one Traveller, providing everyone puts the time in) will confirm this suspicion. General Products did not convert all the Kinunir construction slips to other uses and has chosen to leave them unchanged whilst building new slips for other vessels. The only logical explanation is that General Products has resumed the production of this class. Why they would do so remains unclear.

SALES PITCH

The Travellers' scheduled meeting with the clients can take place at their hotel's conference suite or aboard their ship… or any other location they deem appropriate. There were to be three potential clients present but two cancel at the last moment without providing a reason. Prodding will get the Travellers nowhere; they are dealing with an automated scheduling system which simply repeats that the client apologises for being unable to attend.

The clients originally scheduled were:

- CEO Hector Zarr, representing Rhylanor Freight Services LIC
- Director of Procurement Ruelle Laugur, representing ShortHop Shipping LIC
- Sir Ba-abtab Atwa, representing General Procurement, LIC

If the Travellers are interested in why these representatives cancelled at the last minute, they will have to investigate. No additional information is available from their local offices. A direct approach, such as barging in and demanding answers, would lead to legal complications so a more subtle investigation is necessary. One way to go about this would be to look at publicly available information regarding policies and transactions. There is little obvious but an Average (8+) Investigate check reveals something interesting about each potential client:

- Rhylanor Freight Services is currently diverting some of its ships or rushing them to the loading docks. Others have already left, to an in-system destination. They are not going far, just responding to an urgent short-term contract to deliver quantities of materials to the General Products shipyard. It is clear that the firm has been bought off with a fat contract on condition it boycotts the RVSC pitch.
- ShortHop Shipping was about to go to court over several lawsuits brought by General Products. There are no details available but it seems the megacorporation was trying to harass and bully the smaller firm, a common corporate tactic. All pending cases have suddenly been postponed. There is nothing conclusive about this but it is likely there is a connection between ShortHop pulling out of discussions with RVSC and the curtailment of legal action.
- Sir Ba-abtab Atwa, however, does attend. He is a Bwap, as the Travellers can probably tell from his name. Bwaps are excellent natural administrators and it is not uncommon to find them in senior bureaucratic posts all across the Imperium. Sir Ba-abtab Atwa is also an Imperial knight, suggesting that either he has served very well or his family did so at some time in the past.

As representative for General Procurement, Sir Ba-abtab Atwa is actually the most prestigious of the potential clients. He will be impressed by an orderly atmosphere for the meeting and by solid projections of cost and return – he favours hard numbers over pizazz and salesmanship. The Travellers might realise this if they think about the nature of Bwaps and may be able to tailor their approach to his expected characteristics.

MAKING THE PITCH

However they choose to do it, the Travellers' pitch to Sir Ba-abtab Atwa will need to be set up in advance and there is a protocol to be followed. He is a representative of a body that may spend a lot of money on starships and is used to moving in diplomatic and high-end corporate circles. Whilst he will focus on the deal rather than the wrappings, so to speak, Sir Ba-abtab Atwa will be slightly offended by a gee-whiz or manipulative mind games approach. This will impose DM-2 on his reactions, although he is unlikely to show it. A straight and professional approach will be best in this case.

Sir Ba-abtab Atwa begins with his credentials. This is normal but in this case the experience may be excruciating for the Travellers. He cites every company General Procurement has worked with, their employee numbers, location of key facilities, turnover and major projects in the past 20 years. And he does it in *detail*. Travellers who manage to sit through the whole thing without obviously fidgeting or making snarky remarks

will pass his professionalism test – although this is not a deliberate test, it is the way Sir Ba-abtab Atwa does business. Those who cannot even manage the basics like paying attention through a 30-minute exposition of every job his company has ever done will not be favoured. DM-1 will apply (in addition to any others) to his reactions if the Travellers fidget or mess about. Besides, they might learn something useful…

The high points – if that is the word – of Sir Ba-abtab Atwa's spiel are:

- General Procurement handles procurement and disposal of components and whole vessels for a variety of third-party clients including the Imperial Navy and the Duke of Regina.
- The firm recently established a long-chain supply project for naval munitions for an unspecified client and a disposal route for expired warheads. This will permit a gradual expansion of stocks without straining the local production capability.
- General Procurement is one of the few firms licensed to handle full-capability naval ships on behalf of its clients and has passed stringent tests to become certified as a handler of nuclear munitions.
- Recently, General Procurement organised the transfer of several obsolescent escort and patrol craft from the subsector fleets in Lanth and Rhylanor to local governments. Naturally, he expects a contract to find suitable replacement candidates and is surprised that one has not yet been offered.
- General Procurement is on contract to the Rhylanor and Lanth Subsector fleets to source vessels and components.
- Recently the firm successfully located components to permit the government of Lanth to keep four old in-system defence vessels in commission for at least another 20 years, saving the system defence force millions of Credits in replacement vessels.

This goes on for quite a while, until eventually Stannen is able to put RVSC's credentials forward. This is a rather more succinct presentation, after which the Travellers can finally get down to business. In short, General Procurement is always looking out for new designs and new suppliers that will fit its clients' needs. The firm is willing to look at the new conversions on offer and to consider recommending them to clients. There can be no instant decisions to buy multiple ships; this is an initial pitch to open negotiations if General Procurement is sufficiently interested.

The Travellers can make their pitch any way they like but in this case a simple and straightforward presentation is best. As already noted, a dog and pony show will alienate Sir Ba-abtab Atwa and impose a negative DM. Travellers who make a simple presentation get no positive DM but those who roleplay delivering a glacier of facts, statistics and ever more numbers should be granted DM+1 or even +2 if they do it well. Ultimately, the Travellers must make an Average (8+) Diplomat or a Difficult (10+) Persuade check. Failure indicates Sir Ba-abtab Atwa is not interested at this time, though he may be open to a revised pitch later.

Success does not instantly sell starships. However, if the Travellers succeed in the check Sir Ba-abtab Atwa opens lengthy negotiations with RVSC. Eventually this may lead to a recommendation that a client considers a rebuilt RVSC ship rather than buying new. It will be many months before this bears fruit but the Travellers will have succeeded in their mission at a basic level and will qualify for the Jae Tellona Bonus (see page 104). If the Travellers achieve Effect 4+, Sir Ba-abtab Atwa is quite enthused. Since he is a Bwap this naturally translates as a desire for even more numbers. Do the Travellers have metal fatigue projections for the port side aerofin? Do they know if it is possible for six unassisted humans to move a standard cargo container from the farthest corner of the cargo bay in the event of a cargo handling system failure? How long would that take? How would such heavy labour affect nutrition requirements for the crew and how does that affect operating budget?

Sir Ba-abtab Atwa can go on like this forever and many of his questions exceed their available data. So long as they make an effort, and perhaps have some fun playing out the scene, they will qualify for the Jae Tellona Enhanced Bonus. Sir Ba-abtab Atwa will make a recommendation to some of his clients, setting up secondary meetings with RVSC personnel. The Travellers may not have the same sense of triumph as conquering a mountain or defeating a mob of enemies in a fistfight, but they have done a good job and can expect to be rewarded.

SIR BA-ABTAB ATWA

Sir Ba-abtab Atwa is a member of a reptilian species known as Bawapakerwa-a-a-awapawab, which is shortened to Bwap on most occasions. Like most members of his species, Sir Ba-abtab Atwa is obsessed with details and minutiae, and loves sifting through data looking for patterns. His personal comm is loaded with insanely hard puzzles which he enjoys solving whenever he has a few moments to spare. His role with General Procurement is no accident; Bwaps are excellent administrators and he comes from a family ennobled for their services to the Imperial bureaucracy.

SIR BA-ABTAB ATWA

STR 2 **DEX** 8 **END** 5 **INT** 9 **EDU** 10 **SOC** 10

Skills: Admin 6, Advocate 2, Diplomat 3

Like most Bwaps outside their swampy home environment Sir Ba-abtab Atwa wears a loose kaftan-like garment designed to keep his skin moist. Even so he finds human-normal conditions uncomfortable and will drink a great deal of water during any encounter. He has been working in human-standard conditions all his adult life and is used to this but does very much enjoy getting back to his climate-controlled quarters at the end of a day of meetings. Attempts to somehow use his discomfort against him simply do not work; he is a consummate professional. Indeed, he will sometimes extend meetings when something interests him.

The key to piquing Sir Ba-abtab Atwa's interest and enthusiasm is numbers. Hard, cold numbers, the more detailed the better. He has a natural talent for pulling trends and projections out of a column of statistics, and loves doing it. His enthusiasm takes the form of intense concentration rather than physical excitement but in his soul Sir Ba-abtab Atwa is flying on a magic carpet of hard data. His work with General Procurement might make him a useful contact in the future, or perhaps a source of information. He may also have work for the Travellers.

EXPERT WITNESS

Soon after completing their business with General Procurement, the Travellers are informed there is a gentleman to see them. The information will probably come by way of hotel staff or a messenger-bot which darts up and delivers its invitation to meet with the un-named gentleman. There is no indication of who this is but the invite suggests a meeting at a place 'the gentleman' has hired. He is willing to come to the Travellers, of course.

If the Travellers ignore the invite they may later hear about how a Sword Worlds battlecruiser captain spoke eloquently in defence of some captured Vargr corsairs, and that for some unknown reason the case against them was suddenly dropped on the verge of a guilty verdict. They will not get the chance to take part in these events, however.

If they do, the Travellers find themselves in the presence of Kapiten im Raum Svan Borressen, commanding officer of a Denisov-class battlecruiser. Anyone with even a passing knowledge of the Sword Worlds Confederation will know that this is the most prestigious vessel an officer can command and that this Svan Borressen must be an important man back home. He is not, however, what most Imperials would expect.

Well-groomed and softly spoken for the most part, Borressen is impeccably dressed in the formal uniform of his position, not all that different to an Imperial Navy uniform, perhaps with a little more braid. Whilst he does wear a Holmgang Sword at his belt, there are no 'Viking braids' or fur shoulder-pieces; none of the identifying marks that Imperial entertainment vids like to assign to Sword Worlders. Polite and well-mannered, yet at the same time assured and confident of his own importance, Borressen greets the Travellers and invites them to take some refreshments with him.

Borressen's Galanglic is accented and occasionally contains an unfamiliar idiom but he is anything but the 'space barbarian' depicted in entertainment vids and the more questionable news broadcasts. He explains that he is the captain of the ship's company of the *Theide*, a vessel of the Denisov-class, and is on a diplomatic mission to the Imperium. He says this without any attempt to stress his or the ship's importance – those who do not understand are not worth his time and anyone who does know will be impressed without any need for a tawdry display of self-importance.

Kapiten Borressen has a favour to ask of the Travellers. They are representatives of a starship-related corporation and therefore could be presented

as expert witnesses in an important legal case. He would like them to take a look at the situation and consider whether they would be willing to testify in the defence of a band of Vargr corsairs who were recently captured by the Imperial Navy. They are being portrayed as pirates and will face the death penalty. Borressen considers this unfair and has decided to intervene on their behalf. He asks that the Travellers at least listen to the situation.

THE ZUENG CONUNDRUM

During the Fourth Frontier War, the Vargr corsair group known as the Zueng pledged its loyalty to the so-called Outworld Coalition. In return for a payment and plunder rights, the group joined several others in launching attacks on Imperial shipping. The Zueng were particularly audacious; they are known to have raided as far as Trin's Veil and even took a supply ship in the Mora system. It is clear that Borressen respects this achievement but perhaps that is not surprising. His people admire daring and audacity, and particularly those who are smart enough to get away with their deeds.

The Zueng were hunted as pirates but maintain they were mercenaries conducting commerce raiding on behalf of a client rather than pirates seeking plunder. The judge in this case is refusing to consider the difference, especially as some members of the Zueng have behaved as outright pirates before and since the war. The likely outcome is that the whole group will be sentenced to death just for being members of the Zueng and Borressen does not think this is fair. For this reason he demanded to be allowed to speak in the defence of the Zueng and his status as a diplomatic envoy from the Sword Worlds was enough to obtain a grudging agreement.

Borressen does not think his testimony will be enough and is trying to find expert witnesses to assist him. If they agree, the Travellers will receive an expert witness fee from the court, amounting to Cr500 each per day and more importantly they will be championing justice against serious odds. What honourable spacefarers could refuse? If the Travellers decline, Borressen accepts their position with good grace and bids them farewell.

THE CASE AGAINST THE ZUENG

The Zueng is a 'known pirate organisation' according to the Imperium, with members automatically assumed to be connected with piracy. This warrants arrest on sight but does not mean the subject is guilty of piracy or any associated offence. It is still necessary to prove the subject has engaged in piracy or activities in support of piracy but many courts are prone to consider this proven on the flimsiest of evidence. This appears to be the case here, and the proceedings so far have been distinctly biased.

The Zueng leadership maintain they are a mercenary group and not pirates, and that those who have crossed the line into outright piracy have always been expelled. This may or may not be the truth. This particular group were not directly engaged in piracy when they were apprehended – they could not have been, as they did not have a ship! They are a delegation of senior Zueng officials who were travelling by liner from outside the Imperium to Garda-Vilis in the Vilis subsector. They have stated their intent was to meet with officials of the Tanoose Freedom League to discuss how the League might be supplied with weaponry.

The Tanoose Freedom League is a rebel organisation, although one that professes loyalty to the Imperium. It is in revolt against the imposed government of Garda-Vilis which it accuses of corruption and profiteering on a planetary scale. This makes the intentions of the Zueng distinctly questionable but since the Imperium itself has not taken a position on the rebellion, supporting it cannot be said to be directly anti-Imperial.

The six Zueng members on trial are all middle-aged Vargr, old enough to have taken part in operations during the Fourth Frontier War. None has admitted doing so, but to be senior in the Zueng today they must have served aboard some of its ships in their youth. Essentially, this means the case against the six comes down to the fact they may have served aboard ships carrying out what the Imperium calls piracy but the Zueng maintains was legitimate commerce raiding and they are members of an organisation that has at times engaged in piracy.

This is a flimsy case, with no evidence of actual piracy in the past or any intention of doing so in the present. Nevertheless the court is hostile and the outcome looks clear. Kapiten Borressen hopes to reverse that. He has a case of his own to present but is looking for additional support. As experts in the commercial starship field, the Travellers may be able to provide useful insight or at least some gravitas to his appeal. What he is hoping is to present a case that commerce raiding is a legitimate act of war and therefore anything the Zueng did was not piracy. He wants to use the Travellers as expert witnesses who will answer his questions to the best of their ability and stresses, quite truthfully, that he does not want them to lie or present a particular agenda. He just wants someone credible and unbiased to respond to his questions.

ABOARD A DENISOV

If the Travellers agree, Borressen invites them to dine aboard his ship. He will send a shuttle for them in a few hours and in the meantime must prepare for his presentation. If the Travellers accept they will be greeted aboard the battlecruiser *Thiele* with courtesy and decorum. The ship is, of course, spotless and in perfect condition as all vessels on a diplomatic mission are expected to be. The crew are smartly turned out and professional in appearance.

The main difference between the Sword Worlds vessel and an Imperial one is the lack of formality. Borressen gives most of his orders as requests or statements of what he would like to happen and his crew acknowledge rather casually most of the time. 'Okay, Svan' is an entirely acceptable response, providing the order is obeyed of course. If asked to explain, any of the crew can do so. 'A true leader is always respected and those who have given loyalty are bound by honour to obey'. Rather than obedience to an imposed chain of command, the Sword Worlds system is based on a personal feeling of duty. What happens to those deemed unfit to lead is open to speculation.

Dinner is a full-dress affair for Borressen and his officers. There are a couple of women among them, who are respected as much as any other holder of their rank. However, they are very much in the minority. Borressen's officers are well educated and familiar with Imperial popular culture, and happy to discuss most subjects. They will be offended at attacks on their culture and would consider Travellers who made them to be boors and bigots.

The crew and officers are quite open about their mission, saying it is a goodwill visit that just coincidentally allows them to get a look at the Imperial fleet… and lets the Imperials show them how scary their fleet is. They openly accept that interstellar powers play this game all the time and that it can be quite fun to answer in a forthright manner when an Imperial official tries to cleverly wangle the truth out of them. 'Are you carrying out espionage?' gets responses like 'Why yes, what fool would not be?' and 'Do you have nuclear warheads aboard your ship?' merits a response like 'Well, yes. You can't expect us to pop home to get them if a war breaks out, now can you?' There are many tales of situations like this, in which 'clever' and devious Imperials were bamboozled by the naked truth.

Eventually Borressen explains what he wants the Travellers to do. It is not complex; he will put them on the witness stand as neutral experts and ask questions. Nothing more than that and no duplicity. He cannot, he says with a chuckle, promise the prosecution will be so honourable. They will ask their own questions if they wish and the Travellers are expected to answer.

If the Travellers want to see around the ship, they will be given a tour. Anything sensitive will be locked up of course but the Travellers can take a look at the engineering chambers, the bridge and most other sections of the ship. It is in excellent condition, as a vessel sent on a flag-showing cruise should be, and the crew are efficient at their jobs. Although not as technologically advanced as an Imperial navy vessel, the Denisov battlecruiser is certainly a powerful vessel. Borressen's comment on that is typical of him, 'The more Imperials know that, the less likely I will have to kill them'. This is a rather blunt reference to flag-showing as deterrence but is also indicative of Borressen's personality. He will fight ruthlessly if he has to but would prefer peace through sufficient firepower. Sufficient, since he knows his people are massively outgunned by the Imperials but are tough enough to make them pay a price for any victory they might win.

TRIAL OF THE ZUENG

Borressen has already arranged for the Travellers to be added to the trial. The prosecution is not pleased, since they were confident of winning despite their weak case. They cite numerous instances of vessels that went missing as well as some that were definitely attacked. For their part, the Zueng members refuse to confirm nor deny they took part in any given action and dismiss several of the allegations as spurious. Their legal representative points out that several of the 'kills' attributed to the Zueng are normally considered mysterious losses connected with the Abyss Rift and suggests it is rather odd that the prosecution suddenly wants these to be victims of piracy.

Borressen then calls his expert witnesses. He begins a rather bold defence of the Zueng members by stating that he fought in the Fourth Frontier War. He was an officer aboard the cruiser *Sigurd*, which famously raided Imperial shipping during that conflict. Is the prosecution saying he is a pirate too? What then of the Imperial personnel who raided his people or the Zhodani Consulate? Are they all pirates or just the ones the Imperials do not like? This is risky, since Borressen is presenting evidence that a hostile court could use to convict him of piracy. On the other hand, he is on a diplomatic mission and the Imperials will not want an incident.

Not content with this, Borressen begins calling witnesses starting with Admiral Carlos Santoncheev, commander of the Imperial Spinward Marches fleet.

Borressen reels off a long list of Imperial command officers, stating that every one of them is a witness for the defence because the Imperial Navy has carried out commerce raiding operations and will do so again in the future. With no evidence against them other than membership of an organisation branded pirates by the Imperials, the Zueng members are no more guilty of piracy than any naval officer or rating willing to carry out a raid if ordered to do so.

Borressen has an excellent point. There is no specific evidence of any act that could be considered piracy. The court will not wait weeks whilst someone goes to Macene to fetch the sector admiral and does not want to obey Borressen's demands in general. He is fine with that; it was a piece of theatre and nothing more. He does, however want to cross-examine the expert witnesses. His questions, and those of the prosecution, are noted below.

BORRESSEN'S QUESTIONS TO THE TRAVELLERS

Borressen obviously wants neutral 'experts' to make certain statements in the courtroom. His questions are geared towards that goal, although his agenda may or may not be apparent:

- You are experienced spacefarers, are you not?
- The vessel you crew… is it armed?
- Why is your vessel armed?
- Does possession of this weaponry make you a danger to shipping?
- If you were under attack you would fight, would you not?
- Would you fight to protect a friend, or someone you owed loyalty to?
- If your friend or someone you owed loyalty to was threatened by a great beast too powerful for them or you to fight, would you stand by and let them die?
- Perhaps you might try to distract the beast?
- What if your friend was fighting for their life against a mob? Would you try to get some of them to chase you instead?
- If the only way to distract the mob was to threaten someone they cared about, would you do it to save a friend's life?
- If your ship became disabled and what you needed to save it was nearby but did not belong to you, might you take it?
- Would you do the same to rescue a stranded friend?
- If an unarmed man were carrying ammunition to someone firing at you, would you consider it acceptable to shoot them?
- Would you consider it acceptable to prevent materials reaching a weapons factory, if you know its products will be used against you?
- Have you or have you not just stated that you consider it acceptable to attack someone or something your enemy will rush to protect in order to save a friend? Have you just stated that you might take what you or a friend needed in order to save them or you?

Borressen wants to lead the Travellers, who in this case represent 'the common spacefarer', to say they consider commerce raiding acceptable as it weakens an enemy and draws off some of their warships. He also wants to push the idea that scavenging wrecks after a fight is not the same as piracy for profit and that raiding is a legitimate form of warfare even if the victims are unarmed civilians. The prosecution really have no counter to this. 'But they're… pirates!!!' is not much of a legal argument and in any case there is no evidence that piracy took place at all. The prosecution had relied on muddying the waters and blurring the line between commerce raiding and piracy. Instead what they have is:

- The Zueng had a legitimate warfighting reason to attack Imperial shipping. Their attacks cannot be assumed to be piratical in nature without evidence of a specific profit motivation.
- The attacks cannot be considered war crimes without convicting Borressen, Santoncheev and the entire Imperial Navy.
- Even where wrecks were plundered the possibility exists that the raiders were searching for items they needed to repair their ship or to support themselves, or which could be used to support the war effort elsewhere.
- Therefore, there is no case against the Zueng members for piracy without specific evidence – and there is none.

This all assumes the Travellers make a good case that is useful to Borressen. If they want the Zueng to be found guilty they could derail his defence of course, or they might decline to take part. The Travellers face no penalties in any case – telling the truth in a court is not an offence, no matter how political the case may be. There is, of course, a political dimension to all of this. The Zueng are aiding the Tanoose Freedom League and thereby acting against an Imperial member government. The authorities wanted to block this and a conviction would suffice.

If the Vargr are convicted, they will be deported from Imperial territory. If they or other members of the Zueng subsequently return to any Imperial system they face long-term imprisonment. This is really what the authorities were hoping for; an excuse to ban the organisation and simplify actions against its members. If the Travellers

confound this the Tanoose Freedom League will receive additional weapons and support, to the detriment of the Vilis government and possibly the wider Imperium.

If the Travellers successfully assist Borressen, he is grateful and respectful of them as honourable starfarers. In time he may become a friend, or at least a Contact to be called upon from time-to-time. His ship departs Jae Tellona soon after the trial ends – with the Zueng members aboard. The Travellers may wonder if he was in league with them all along but this is not the case. He was just doing what he thought was right. The Travellers may encounter Borressen or the Zueng later but not before they reach Arden and great events begin to unfold around them.

KAPITEN IM RAUM SVAN BORRESSEN

Kapiten Borressen is a high flyer in the Sword Worlds Confederation Navy. By a combination of charisma, drive and talent he gained rapid promotion, rising to command a small escort then increasingly powerful ships. He is confident and assured, and subscribes to the ideal that truly effective people do not need to make a noise about their achievements. Anyone worth his time knows how impressive he is; those that cannot see it are irrelevant.

Borressen runs a highly effective crew in a relaxed manner. He believes it is important to make sure everyone knows what is expected of them and is offered help if they need it. Once expectations and capabilities are established he is intolerant of laziness and stupidity, and he is distinctly contemptuous of those who have little drive or competence. Fakers are a particular hate of his, as they are not merely a dangerous hole in an otherwise capable crew; they are also deceiving their crewmates.

KAPITEN IM RAUM SVAN BORRESSEN

STR 9 **DEX** 7 **END** 8 **INT** 9 **EDU** 10 **SOC** 10

Admin 1, Astrogation 3, Diplomat 2, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Leadership 4, Melee (blade) 2, Tactics (naval) 4, Vacc Suit 2

Weapons: Holmgang Sword (2D)
Armour: Vacc Suit (+8)

If required, Borressen will do what is necessary to defeat his enemies. He finds commerce raiding distasteful but would carry it out without hesitation as he knows it weakens the Imperials and draws off their fleet. He would prefer military targets and relishes the idea of putting his battlecruiser alongside a major Imperial ship in a straight and honourable fight. However, his duty is to win the war rather than chasing glory. He knows he has been trusted with command of a very fine and prestigious ship, and he is expected to use it in the most effective manner possible. This probably means an audacious raiding cruise with a well-timed return to base in order to preserve the asset that is his ship. However, he would consider sacrificing the vessel if the inspirational value were great enough. Could he make it all the way to Deneb, drawing dozens of Imperial ships after him? Borressen would like to try.

Holmgang Sword

FULACIN

Fulacin lies on the Spinward Main but whilst its excellent orbital starport receives large volumes of shipping hardly anyone visits the surface. The officially recorded population is around 800, all of them employees of the firm MagnetoDynamics or their dependents. At any given time there are a great many more temporary workers and contractors on-planet who do not have the status of permanent residents.

At first glance the world's profile suggests it may be ripe for colonisation but this is not the case. There is sufficient water and a theoretically breathable atmosphere but both are tainted by heavy metal dust which causes respiratory illnesses in a short period and longer-term health problems if the victim survives. As a result Fulacin received a token 'landgrab' population whose main purpose was to serve the starport.

To this day much of the planet remains unexplored. It has been mapped from orbit of course but with so many worlds to develop this one remains very low on the list of priorities. There is an advanced ecosystem which includes species sometimes found elsewhere in the sector. Among these is the groat, a hardy herbivore which seems resistant to the world's taint and an aggressive predator often known as the snowcat.

MAGNETODYNAMICS

As a link on the Spinward Main, Fulacin required a starport. For many years this was a small orbital installation providing little more than fuel to passing ships, paired with an even smaller downport which was home to around 200 people. Defining some of these as residents of Fulacin created a planetary population who could be granted Imperial Member status, thereby making Fulacin Imperial territory. This was sufficient for the authorities and for many decades the world was more or less forgotten.

The arrival of MagnetoDynamics in 1040 saw an influx of workers and an expansion of the downport into something resembling a very small city. Other settlements were set up here and there, if local conditions favoured an extraction plant. The downport grew into a 'corp town' where every business was licensed by MagnetoDynamics and most services were provided directly by the company. Existing businesses were bought out or brought under company license, in general without difficulty. MagnetoDynamics is today effectively the world government.

FULACIN

Profile	A674210-D	
Starport	A	Excellent
Size	6	9,600km
Atmosphere	7	Standard; Tainted
Hydrosphere	4	40%
Population	2	Hundreds
Government Type	1	Company/Corporation
Law Level	0	No prohibitions
Technology Level	13	Above Average Imperial

The region around the downport, now designated Fulacin Down, is surrounded by large towers which draw in atmospheric gases and process them to extract useful chemicals. Similar plants line the shores of nearby seas. The plants are mostly automated, with inspection crews rotating endlessly among them. It is a measure of how much of a backwater Fulacin is that no protests have been lodged against the alteration of natural atmospheric content. Some local lifeforms appear to be moving away from the regions downwind from the towers or becoming scarcer in those regions. MagnetoDynamics appears to have no interest in investigating the ecological effects of its activities other than to issue the now notorious statement that 'the groats don't taste any different'.

Away from Fulacin Down there is little but vast wilderness, with the odd atmospheric processing tower or shore installation on the horizon. A few prospecting camps have been set up, mostly by independent groups operating under licence from MagnetoDynamics. Few of these are permanent and fewer still have led to exploitation efforts. Even when good deposits are found the company tends to just buy the rights and tag the area as a reserve for future exploitation. Offers from small mining firms to subcontract for extraction are politely declined. The few mining sites that have been set up are mostly small and tend to be proof-of-value operations rather than profitable mines.

RESCUE AT FULACIN

The Travellers' point of entry to the Spinward Main is at Fulacin. The intent is to make a refuelling stop at the highport and move on, as so many vessels do. There is no meeting scheduled at this world, although that is no reason not to show off the ship or try to find additional clients. There is quite a lot of traffic around the highport, most of it jump-1 ships going one way or the other along the Spinward Main or jump-2 vessels in from Jae Tellona. As the Travellers take their place in the docking approach queue, anyone on the bridge is likely to notice some anomalous readings from the planet below. They are inconclusive and soon gone. The most likely explanation is that Fulacin's atmospheric taint is interfering with local comms signals causing ionisation or some other sensor ghost producing effect. This impression is broadly correct – Fulacin's atmospheric taint does cause some interference.

The Travellers can make as much or as little of their stopover at Fulacin highport as they like. A couple of days away from the ship is useful to prevent crew fatigue and they do have permission to run up reasonable expenses in keeping with the lifestyle of starship sales reps. Side adventures and random encounters might ensue but at some point the Travellers will depart. Their destination is a port further spinward on the main but before they reach the jump point other events intervene.

Another sensor anomaly is detected. This one is stronger and more persistent than the first. The location is similar, allowing for atmospheric distortion. As the Travellers are wondering what it might be, their sensor system begins behaving very oddly. Data, in the form of incomprehensible numbers, begins to be presented in tables which are apparently cross-referencing with one another. This is not an AutoBridge feature. After a few moments the tables disappear and are replaced with an image of a wedge-shaped starship that might be familiar to the Travellers. It is a Kinunir-class 'cruiser', and its image is accompanied by a summary table.

VESSEL TYPE: Kinunir-class 78.2% Confidence.
VESSEL IDENTITY: Unknown.
LOCATION: Planetary Surface.
CONDITION: Structurally Intact 88.4% Confidence.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Debris nearby. Low power readings. Negative transponder.

ANALYSIS: Vessel has been forced to crash-land or has been brought down. Communications offline or deliberately disabled.

This information dump has been triggered by a low-powered distress signal emitted by the wreck on an unusual band. It would be mistaken for interference by anyone without the equipment to decode it. That has been done automatically by the intelligence package aboard the prototype, which might prompt the Travellers to wonder what secrets their ship is hiding. Nobody on board knows about the package, so there are no immediate answers to be had.

The Travellers will need to decide what to do with the information, however. Nobody else has received it and unless a navy ship gets close enough to pick up the signal it will be lost. The Travellers could of course just head for their next destination but there is a mystery and a chance for profit here. It is not necessary to obtain permission to enter orbit; the port cares only about its docking approaches and the planetside installations handle their own traffic control whenever they get a visiting ship. The Travellers can discreetly land and investigate if they choose to do so. There might be salvage rights, rewards for a rescue or the chance to rifle through the contents of a navy warship… and all theoretically legitimate since they are responding to a distress signal.

A ZHODANI CONSPIRACY

The vessel downed on Fulacin is an Improved Kinunir patrol destroyer named *Malishu*. It is not a vessel of the Imperial Navy – not yet at least. The ship is more or less complete and was ostensibly out on trials when it came to Fulacin, although there was more to the mission than that. General Products hopes to secure a big contract to supply the subsector fleets in the Rhylanor and Lanth subsectors with patrol vessels and is going about it in an underhand manner. *Malishu* came to Fulacin to meet another vessel. This was the yacht *Calston Riviera*, personal transport of Sir Hamex Calston.

Sir Hamex Calston holds the rank of commodore in the Imperial Navy and is assigned to the procurement and disposal department of the sector fleet. He is currently

on leave, officially listed as taking care of some family business but is in fact meeting with representatives of General Products in regard to the procurement of an entire class of starship. In short, the intention was that he be 'just passing through the Fulacin system' when a General Products vessel happened by and was 'so impressed by its capabilities' that he just had to send a glowing recommendation to his superiors. This is a rather sleazy bypass of the normal procurement procedure and unfair to competitors but Sir Calston was sure of a large payment from General Products which soothed any misgivings. Unfortunately, everything went wrong.

The seeds of this disaster were planted just after the Fourth Frontier War, when a programme of placing operatives on important Imperial worlds was expanded. Those sent to places like Rhylanor and Trin were expected to gather intelligence and perhaps someday engage in sedition, assassination or sabotage missions. They might even act as or direct a fifth column to assist in an invasion attempt. Some were active agents, some 'sleepers' who did not even know they were Zhodani until their psionic conditioning was triggered.

Alongside these major-world projects, operatives were inserted to many backwater and minor systems; places like Fulacin. These were dedicated people, their loyalty and determination enhanced by psionic conditioning. Their purpose was looser than elsewhere – essentially they were to be ready for when they were needed, without a particular mission. So it was with Fulacin. A group of operatives was inserted among the 'Wildcatter' population; people unaffiliated with MagnetoDynamics.

The Wildcatters are not supposed to be on Fulacin and often occupy abandoned installations despite them having no right to do so. MagnetoDynamics generally ignores them however, since they do little harm and cannot exploit in bulk anything they find. Their best option – even if it has to be pointed out to them by means of gun and writ – is to sell the rights to whatever they find to MagnetoDynamics. At worst irrelevant and occasionally useful, the Wildcatters explore remote parts of Fulacin and unearth some of its treasures.

Most of the Wildcatters on Fulacin are drifters or professional small-team prospectors with no agenda beyond making a living. Some, however, are Zhodani assets. These join other Wildcatter groups and mingle with them. One such group is currently occupying Prospecting Outpost NN-4A6, better known as Naysix to its current inhabitants. Out of a population of twelve, five are Zhodani operatives. The rest are completely oblivious to the fact they live with spies.

The Wildcatter spies have been doing what they were sent to do years ago – make ready for whatever comes their way. They have extended an old mine shaft and concealed their weaponry, and collect data on the planet and its conditions just in case it is ever needed. They also explore, ranging widely in their air/rafts. They do not know what they are looking for, just that if they find anything unusual they are to report it by way of their secure datanet channel and their commanders will decide what to do with the information when they finally receive it. If orders come, they will be ready to act at a moment's notice.

Meanwhile, other assets were inserted into the workforce at General Products. Some of them are now crewmembers aboard the first vessel of the highly secret Improved Kinunir class of warship. Once it was ready for trials, their orders came down – steal the ship and deliver it to the Consulate. Given they held positions of trust aboard, that was achievable. However, the operatives knew of another opportunity; an Imperial noble holding high naval rank was due to hold an illicit meeting aboard the vessel as part of a corrupt deal to bypass the naval procurement system. Perhaps he could also be captured? The intelligence services refer to this sort of coup as a 'pinch' and this could be a big one.

The plan was relatively simple. The operatives aboard *Malishu* would wait until their vessel met with that of Sir Hamex Calston over Fulacin. With the assistance of the operatives on-planet they would pinch both the ship and the noble, then make a dash for the border. With a jump-4 ship at their disposal they could be in Zhodani space in a little over a month. Risky, perhaps, but the payoff was potentially worth it. They made the decision to try.

AMBUSH AT FULACIN

The *Calston Riviera* was cruising in low orbit over Fulacin, not a place a noble's yacht would normally be but certainly not illegal. Sir Calston could legitimately refuse to answer questions about why he was there just at the time the Improved Kinunir arrived – if those questions were ever asked at all. *Malishu* arrived on schedule, having jumped into the outsystem and headed in to the mainworld under low power. She had a military transponder which could be set to not respond to civilian 'pings' and thus went undetected. Using this setting when the ship was not under naval command was illegal but that was not much of a concern given her mission.

Malishu was undergoing trials with a small crew aboard. Insufficient for long-term operations, they were enough to run the ship for a couple of weeks. She slipped into orbit undetected, exchanging low-

emission tightbeam greetings with the yacht. Neither was supposed to be there, nobody knew they were. As the ships began to match orbits, a team from *Malishu* took the pinnace out to conduct trials, or so they said. Once clear of the ship, two of the pinnace crew drew concealed pistols and eliminated their crewmate. They announced a 'touch and go' landing as a test of systems and dived fast towards the surface.

Meanwhile, the assets among the Wildcatters entered the mine shaft and retrieved their long-hidden weapons. Their trusted friends, who had shared dangerous escapades on the surface of Fulacin for years, were liquidated in seconds. The pinnace touched down and they boarded, heading for the parent ship. As they did so, the yacht's shuttle conveyed Sir Hamex Calston aboard the *Malishu*, where he was greeted with due ceremony. The boat departed and the shuttle arrived, armed Zhodani agents gunning down the small craft technicians and heading for the command spaces.

What happened next was a confused blur; a bodyguard and loyal crew fighting back as best they could. A chase through the ship and the activation of security lockouts. *Malishu* fired on the yacht's boat, damaging it badly, but it docked and the yacht attempted to escape. No distress signal was transmitted, to protect the reputation of Sir Hamex. The yacht was already accelerating away with its crippled boat partway in the docking bay when the crew realised the owner was not aboard. It was too late, the Kinunir's particle guns were coming online. With only one option left they initiated an emergency jump from within the extreme-hazard zone. The yacht misjumped and has not been sighted since.

Malishu's crew lost control during the fight, causing the vessel to begin a rapid descent. Some of the Zhodani were able to save themselves by returning to the pinnace and attempting to launch. They were more or less successful but had few options on where to go. As an interim measure they returned to their settlement to ponder their next move. Aboard *Malishu*, a pilot was able to mitigate the crash but could not prevent it. There are survivors aboard but they are in grave danger. With no communications there is little chance of rescue until a surface survey notices the ship and that cannot happen in the immediate future. There is a storm approaching, laden with toxic dust, which will further confuse the situation.

REACHING THE WRECK

The general location of the wreck is not hard to find but sensor data is confused by the atmospheric dust and a clear picture is not available. The vessel does not respond to communications, although the Wildcatter settlement about three kilometres away auto-responds to transponder pings. It identifies the installation by its formal designation NN-4A6 and warns of toxic dust conditions as normal, with an elevated risk due to a storm in progress. No further communication is possible.

Descending through the dust storm is a little nerve-wracking. Sensor readings are distorted whilst optical-spectrum devices cannot see more than a few metres at times. A good pilot, proceeding cautiously, should not get into serious trouble although there are occasional dips or buffeting side gusts. The Referee should call for an Average (8+) Pilot check and use the Effect as an indicator of how rough or smooth the ride was. A very bad check might make everyone sick but there are no horrific consequences of failure. Even if the pilot screws up horribly the automated terrain-avoidance system will prevent a crash so long as the ship's drives are functional.

However, given the confused sensor readings caused by metallic dust the Travellers may get a few surprises. The terrain-avoidance system may be triggered by a false reading, suddenly applying full thrust to avoid a collision with an imaginary mountain. This might inspire the Travellers to fiddle about with the sensor settings or to take other measures to smooth out the descent. The Referee can ask for appropriate skill checks but messing about with the sensors does produce one odd effect; suddenly a second set of sensor data overlays their own. The system tries to make sense of it and avoid the ground that is suddenly very close indeed. After a moment the two are resolved and the Travellers get a few seconds of imagery from the crashed Improved Kinunir. This is not very useful – dust storms look the same from most angles – but it may spark their curiosity.

Landing on uneven ground, with debris from the crash here and there and irregular wind gusts, is a tricky business. The Travellers may discover a useful or frustrating – or both – feature of the AutoBridge system. If the ship thinks it is about to ground too hard it will automatically abort the landing and gain height. The problem is, the system is a bit too cautious. An acceptable landing might be aborted to the annoyance of everyone aboard. The solution is to fine-tune this system or turn it off. With it off it is possible to slam the ship into the ground hard enough to damage it. If the system is engaged this cannot happen.

The Referee should call for a Difficult (10+) Pilot check. As currently set, the system will not permit a landing with less than Effect +3. This can be altered by trial and error to any value the Travellers want. Note that even an Effect of -2 or so will not seriously

damage the ship. It will, however, cause some dings and perhaps break a few internal objects. Given the Travellers' mission, this may be a concern and cause some acrimony among the crew.

Once on the ground the Travellers will need filter masks or other breathing equipment to avoid inhaling the atmospheric taint. Whatever other equipment they think they will need should be specified before they set out. Visibility is poor but there is little chance of getting lost between the ships if the Travellers are sensible. Even distorted comms signals and sensor readings will be enough of a guide. Gusts make the dust thicker and then thinner again, causing the wreck to emerge suddenly from the gloom.

The downed vessel has the distinctive shape of a Kinunir cruiser, although with sleeker lines and some variation in proportions. The vessel appears to have come down somewhat nose-up, crushing its aft landing gear before slamming down on its belly. The underside of the hull is apparently ruptured, and there are cracks here and there on other surfaces. The pinnace bay doors are open and badly twisted. It looks like they will have to be cut off and replaced, and in general there seems to be some twisting of the ship's structure. There is still no response on comms and no sign of the pinnace.

GAINING ENTRY

The wreck is lying on slightly sloping terrain, partially dug in buy the force of the crash. Its nose is buried in soft ground. It would not be difficult to climb onto the upper surface from the front of the ship and walk along the top, although gusty winds might occasionally make this more hazardous. A Traveller might also climb up the aft section of the ship to reach the pinnace bay doors, which are standing wide open.

There are no other easy ways of gaining entry. All external hatches, valves and airlocks were secured when the anti-boarding measures were activated. Resourceful Travellers might manage to get a maintenance hatch open or expand a crack somewhere but the most likely point of entry is the pinnace bay. The Referee should keep in mind that the atmospheric taint can get into the ship through open hatches and doors. Contamination will be relatively slight, and the vessel's life-support system will try to create overpressure to blow dust out, but there are risks inherent in taking off breathing equipment in tainted areas. This is only likely to be a problem if someone blows a large hole in the side of the ship.

THE MALISHU SITUATION

The vessel's power plant is online but all systems are operating at a reduced level. Lights are dim, air circulation is normal except where overpressure seems desirable and water/sewage systems are operating well. There are some cracks or breaks in pipes, however, so in some areas there may be seepage. This may or may not be clean water. The ship is in defensive mode, with its hatches and doors sealed, but the attackers have over-ridden some of these to gain access to more of the vessel. The hull creaks and groans as gusts of wind cause it to distort, especially when a gust catches the side of the fin.

The ship was operating with a greatly reduced crew for the purposes of its trials, some of whom were armed with personal weapons for security. They never really stood a chance, even with the assistance of the internal monitors and security systems, but they put up enough of a fight that most of the hijackers retreated and left them to their fate. This does mean that the surviving Zhodani agents have failed in both their missions – they have seized neither ship nor human target and may have compromised their cover. They are dedicated enough to risk their lives but nobody is prepared to die to fail. It is inevitable they will make another attempt on the ship once they realise it is reachable.

The crash has thrown every loose object inside the ship around and smashed many of them. This makes detective work very difficult. The Travellers may find bullet-riddled corpses and guns in a chamber but it will not be clear who shot whom, or if a third party was responsible. Some rather gross quick and dirty investigation is possible, perhaps by digging bullets out of a corpse and matching them to weapons. Travellers whose computers are set up for forensics work or can be configured by an inventive operator may be able to match fingerprints to weapons and tie the shooter to the target by way of the bullet. Others will have to take an educated guess.

When the Travellers enter the wreck they have no idea what to expect. Dim lighting, creaks from the hull and mysterious bodies might lead them to jump to conclusions. The Referee should play on their paranoia if possible, making the investigation of the vessel a tense and creepy experience rather than a dry search for something to shoot. The Referee should also keep in mind that the vessel is not fully fitted out. The Travellers will eventually notice there are no Imperial or Navy insignia anywhere, nor is anyone in a uniform. The overall impression is a spaceworthy but not quite finished vessel still in the hands of its builders.

There are a handful of robots aboard. These are commercially available types and not necessarily the ones that will be used if the Imperial Navy adopts the design. Every deck has a general cleaning/maintenance bot and there are medical-assistance and cargo handling bots in their specialist areas, plus a couple of 'carrybots' that are little more than automated trollies that deliver heavy or bulky items wherever in the ship they are needed. These are normally stored in the workshop storage area but might be encountered anywhere in a functional, malfunctioning or destroyed condition.

The bots are pieces of machinery, not 'cute robots'. They do not talk and do not have any form of personality, other than a few quirks in the way that they interpret orders. Orders can be given to a carrybot or cleaning/maintenance bot by anyone with Crew access. Medical bots can normally be commanded by any crewmember subject to override by a specialist or command level officer. working in that department.

How the Referee uses the bots is subject to dramatic interpretation. A crippled bot might cause a disturbance, thrashing about amid the wreckage, and bring nervous Travellers to investigate. Or it might be lying, powered-down or smashed in the crash, as nothing more than scenery. Bots cannot be used to gain information and will not actively help the Travellers, other than by obeying direct commands, but they may be useful at times and a distraction at others.

INSIDE THE SHIP

The Improved Kinunir takes the general form of a flattened cone with a prominent dorsal fin. There are three decks whose size varies due to the hull form. The space between the inhabited decks is generally taken up with fuel tanks and other liquid storage such as lubricants, drinking water and other stores that can be fitted into oddly shaped spaces. The hull is internally partitioned by bulkheads which form part of the ship's structure.

Bulkheads are extremely difficult to breach and would require specialist cutting equipment or a great deal of energy from a laser or plasma weapon to burn a hole through. Bulkheads are penetrated by iris valves, which are almost as resilient as the bulkhead when locked. In the event of an emergency such as a hull breach or security alert, iris valves close automatically and require special authorisation to open. This normally rests with the ship's officers or someone they designate. For damage-control purposes there are overrides on the bridge and in the drive room to allow a coordinating officer to grant emergency parties access to other parts of the ship.

Some bulkheads do not have iris valves but are penetrated by manually operated hatches instead. These are operated by the traditional wheel, which withdraws the locking pins from the bulkhead. Hatches are not remotely controlled and cannot be; they can however be jammed by placing an obstruction through the open/close wheel. Most internal walls are lighter partitions, which can be smashed through with some effort. Partitions are penetrated by light doors, and will hold pressure only for a short time before failing. Internal doors can be kicked off their mountings by a determined person but they are tough and dismounting or breaching one will require significant effort.

Deck floors are also bulkheads, with a narrow (typically 80 centimetres) equipment space directly below each. This contains pipes, ducts, conduits and wiring as well as internal sensors, floor grav plates and the like. Under it is a ceiling for the deck below, which is the equivalent of a partition. Floor grav plates provide a standard 1G unless controlled to do something different from the bridge. The plates are designed to provide a measure of inertial compensation but cannot change their field fast enough to entirely negate the effects of acceleration or deceleration. They might mitigate a crash a little but only a little. The plates' maximum output is about 2.4G for a very short time, i.e. to compensate for a rapid change of velocity. Sustained output is in the 0-1.2G range.

INTERNAL SECURITY

The outer hull of the Improved Kinunir is penetrated at various points by airlocks and other access points. It might be possible to cut a path into the ship although the hull but this does risk entering a liquid-hydrogen fuel tank, sewage processing tank or other hazardous/noxious area. The ship's outer hull is armoured against warship weapons, so cutting a path in would take some time even with the right equipment.

Most entry points are locked unless the ship's officers or its automatic systems unlock them. It would not normally be possible to accidentally hit the cargo ramp button and vent the lower deck to space, for example. Nor could unauthorised personnel simply walk up and open an airlock while the ship is grounded. Automatic security systems are in place, which will allow access to the outer entry points and key areas of the ship only to certain personnel. The ship's systems grant access based on a keycard system.

The card does not normally require to be presented, except at certain secure areas. Most commonly it operates on a transponder basis, which also allows personnel to be tracked. Some functions, such as jump initiation and missile launch, do require the card to be placed in a slot but in most cases doors and iris valves will open as an authorised crewmember approaches them unless the ship is on alert or a privacy lock has been initiated.

Access using any given card can be amended by the ship's captain or executive officer, or granted from the bridge on a temporary basis by any officer. Thus the captain can amend a crewmember's card to give access to a weapons turret or arms locker on a permanent or temporary basis, or any officer on the bridge can instruct the door to unlock so that an otherwise unauthorised crewmember can clean the missile launchers.

COMMAND CARDS are issued to the captain, executive officer and chief engineer. They give access to all areas and functions.
OFFICER CARDS are issued to all officers. They give access to all areas necessary for an officer's duties. For example, marine officers would have access to weapons lockers but not engineering spaces.
SPECIALIST CARDS give access to normal crew spaces plus a specialist duty area. For example, gunners have turret access; marine weapons technicians have arms-locker access.
CREW CARDS give access to normal crew spaces such as the galley and whatever area the crewmember normally works in. For example, engineering technicians have access to the drive rooms but not weapons turrets.

Groundside access is normally via the ship's loading ramps, or by lowering the whole cargo platform to the ground, or by flying a grav vehicle into the vehicle bay on A deck. In space, access is normally via the small craft bay at the aft of the ship. There is a personnel airlock on A deck for EVA (extra-vehicular activity, in other words operations outside the ship) whilst the ship is in space.

Since this vessel is still in the hands of its builders, this system has been only partially implemented. The commander, first officer and chief engineer had Command level keycards and all other personnel were issued Crew cards. Blank keycards were stored in the security office for issue as necessary. This means that some functions can only be accessed using one of the Command cards. Two of the three are still aboard.

Q DECK

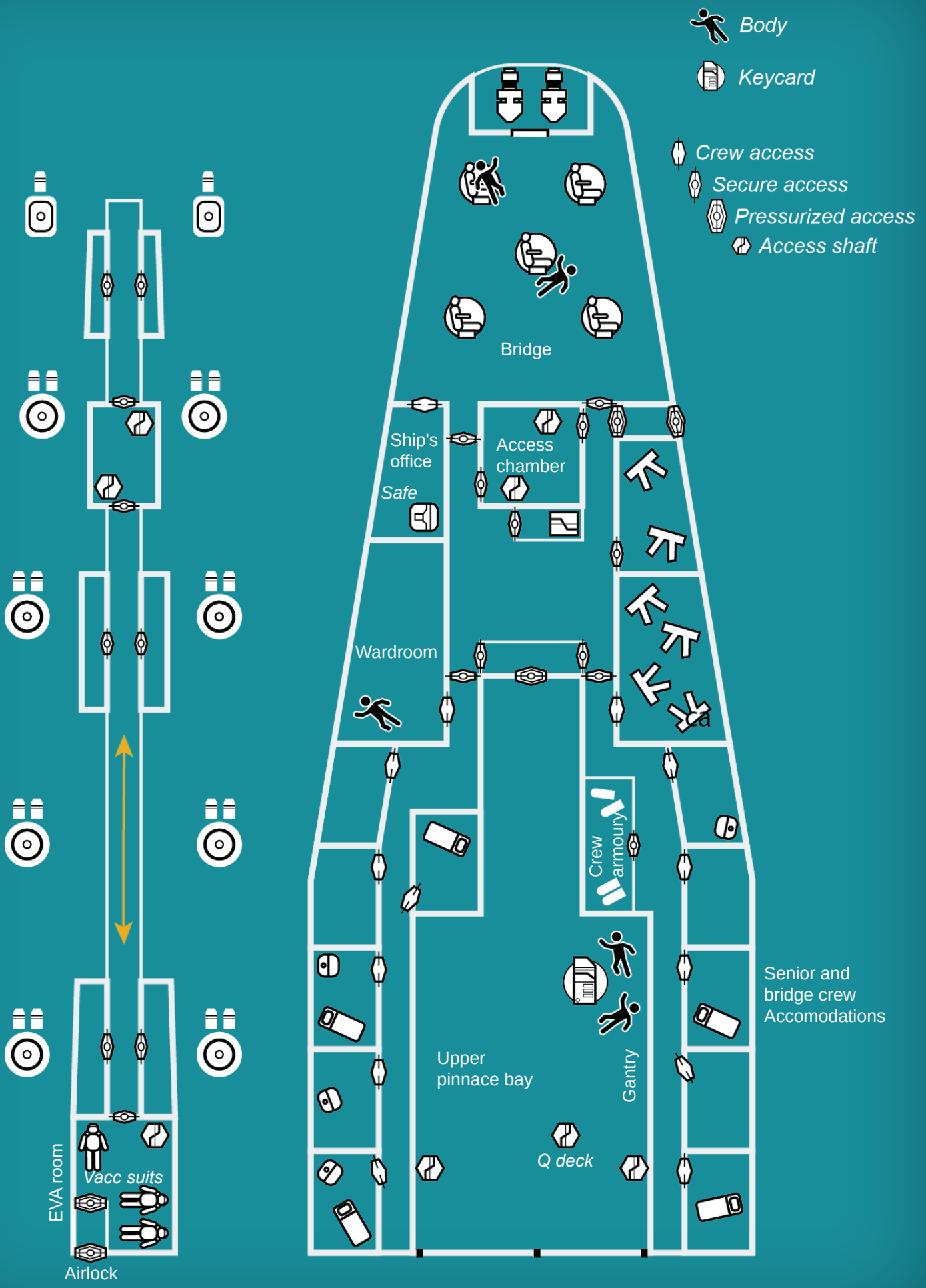
The dorsal fin and associated components are collectively referred to as Q Deck, although this is not a 'deck' in the proper sense. Personnel spaces are cramped, just big enough to give access to essential systems and storage lockers. The latter contain items that are not likely to be used very often if at all. Q Deck is sometimes referred to as 'the attic' and it is inevitably the most junior personnel who are sent up there to get something.

The majority of the ship's armament is mounted along the base of the dorsal fin. There are four laser turrets each side, with a pair of particle accelerator barbettes at the front corners. This permits both accelerators to bear on a target in front of the ship or one to each side. These weapons cannot bear aft and are blocked by the ship's structure from firing in a 'downward' direction. The ship can quickly pitch or roll to bring them to bear, however. Laser weapons are likewise restricted to one side of the ship or the other, and 'upward' relative to the ship's main axis.

These turrets can be accessed from a crawlway running through the base of the fin and can be manually operated from within the turret. However, they are almost always remotely operated and normally accessed only for inspection and maintenance. The missile armament, on the other hand, requires crew in attendance. Two turrets are mounted, one on the aft tip of the lower hull, with a magazine and missile preparation area close by. These turrets can also be remotely operated but standard practice is to have a gunner physically in the turret and a technician overseeing the automated loading mechanism.

This whole area is pretty basic even in a fitted-out and operational ship. Only the EVA room would have extensive facilities as vacc suits and rescue equipment

DECK Q AND A


Body
Keycard
Crew access
Secure access
Pressurized access
Access shaft
Bridge
Ship's office
Safe
Access chamber
Wardroom
Crew armoury
Upper pinnace bay
Gantry
Q deck
Senior and bridge crew Accomodations
EVA room
Vacc suits
Airlock

need servicing. In the present situation the chamber is more or less bare other than a small emergency locker. It is possible that one or more of the Zhodani agents will use the crawlway to move fore and aft whilst concealed, getting behind the Travellers or out of an area that would seem suspicious.

A DECK

A Deck is the narrowest of the main decks. It forms the base of the dorsal fin but is considerably wider. A Deck is mostly concerned with flight and command operations. An access shaft at the fore end of the dorsal fin runs down to the lower decks through A deck. The aft access shaft runs up to the fin and the EVA room. There are also inter-deck access hatches on the rear flanks of this deck, leading down to B deck. Most crew do not require access to A deck, which makes it relatively easy to keep the command area secure.

1. Avionics and Sensors
2. Bridge
3. Ship's Office
4. Briefing/Planning Room
5. Crew Armoury
6. Access/Security chamber
7. Senior and Bridge Crew Accommodation
8. Wardroom
9. Aft Access Shaft to Q Deck

Despite the impact with the ground, the ship is reasonably intact although fittings have sprung loose and small objects are scattered all over the floor. Fitting-out was incomplete so most areas are in a liveable-at-best condition and some cabins are just shells. Much of the equipment that would be aboard a functional vessel – tools, emergency softsuits, spares and small luxuries – are entirely absent or present in a minimal quantity. It is probable that this vessel would not pass a standard spaceworthiness inspection for lack of many minor but required items. However, General Products passed their own vessel as spaceworthy and its condition – before the incident – was good enough for trials with a skilled crew.

A DECK FORWARD

Everything forward of the access/security chamber is secured both electronically and physically. Obtaining a command level keycard grants access. Once the Travellers have done so they can view security footage and see the incident play out from the return of the pinnace and elimination of the support team to the attempt to seize Sir Hamex and the subsequent fight and crash. After that footage is partial and patchy. The Travellers will be able to download or delete the footage if they have access. They can also gain access to the ship's logs but they say nothing about the meeting, just references to a trials cruise before final fitting-out.

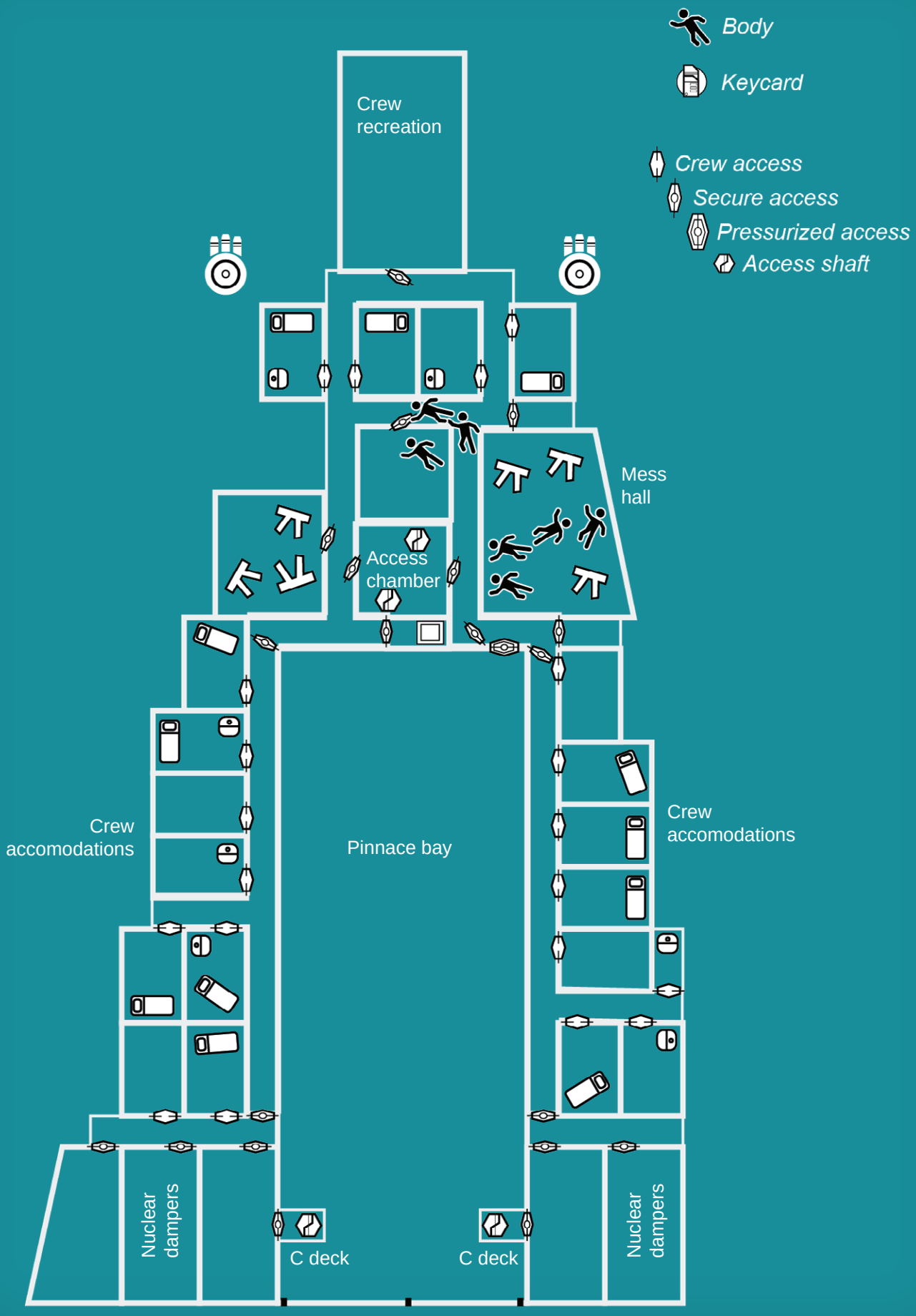
There are two bodies on the bridge, both dressed in General Products-issue working coveralls. The pilot is strapped into her seat and appears to have suffered a gunshot wound to the abdomen before taking her station. The other crewmember is beside the captain's chair but does not have a command-level access card. He appears to have triggered the emergency lockdown but succumbed to injuries taken in the crash. Both legs and his pelvis are broken, with no sign he was the victim of deliberate violence.

The crew were operating on a low-security setting before the attack, with all personnel able to access all systems. This might have been useful with a small crew undertaking trials but it did not account for treachery. Once triggered, the security system should have restricted use of command-level cards to designated carriers but this was one of the disabled features. Thus, the Travellers will be able to use any card they find. If they are really stuck and cannot find one to get access to this area, the Referee may decide that additional command level cards had been created and perhaps been left lying around somewhere.

Within the ship's office is an electronically locked safe which responds to command level access. There is little inside except the ship's fund of 'contingency cash'. This amounts to Cr250000 in high-denomination Credit plaques and an assortment of smaller denominations totalling Cr32000 or so. The cash is useable by anyone but has been electronically marked and could be traced by General Products. The armoury is more or less empty. The crew had a few pistols and a couple of shotguns aboard. Some of these, along with some ammunition and spare magazines, may still be present. There are no heavier weapons.

A DECK AFT

Only the forward access valve in the security chamber requires command level. Up, down or aft requires only Crew level access. What would eventually be the wardroom for officers is a bare shell but all the cabins are at least usable. There are few personal effects aboard as the crew were essentially 'at work' for the duration of the test cruise rather than living aboard in the usual sense. There is a body in this area; a crewmember caught unprepared and unarmed, riddled with pistol bullets and left for dead.


Body
Keycard
Crew access
Secure access
Pressurized access
Access shaft
Crew recreation
Mess hall
Access chamber
Crew accomodations
Pinnace bay
Crew accomodations
Nuclear dampers
C deck
C deck
Nuclear dampers

DECK B

B DECK

B Deck is the uppermost of the main decks and primarily contains crew accommodation forward, with the upper part of the pinnace bay aft. All crewmembers require access to this deck, so 'Crew' level access is adequate for all access points other than the upward shaft to A Deck.

1. Crew Recreation/Common Area
2. Crew Accommodation Forward Block
3. Access Chamber and Galley Stores
4. Galley and Mess Hall
5. Crew Accommodation Aft Block
6. Pinnace Bay Upper
7. Nuclear Dampers
8. Access Shafts Down to C Deck

B DECK FORWARD

The whole forward section of B deck is unsecured. Doors will open automatically if functional, although some are warped and may need to be 'assisted' by a boot or other heavy implement. The crew accommodation area is barely fitted out but some cabins were in use. The galley is stocked for a month, assuming a crew of 20, with a few luxuries clearly intended for celebration of milestones in the cruise. Three of the crew tried to flee into this area and were shot through doors or cornered and executed. If the Travellers are able to investigate there are powder burns indicating point-blank execution even on those who were already critically wounded.

B DECK AFT

Most of B deck should require crew level access, but this has been disabled. The vessel's nuclear damping system is intact, giving access to C deck below by way of the associated shafts. The pinnace bay is where the Travellers are most likely to enter the ship. They will probably come in through the aft doors at C deck level but movement into the rest of the ship requires getting up to B deck level and using the gantry that runs right around the pinnace berth at that level.

The gantry leads into a platform from where the rest of the ship can be accessed. There are two bodies here; unarmed personnel in the working coveralls of General Products employees. These were the technicians assigned to look after the pinnace, who naturally came to greet the crew when they arrived. The techs had just long enough to wonder why a bunch of planetsiders were exiting the shuttle before they were shot. Their Crew level keycards are still on their bodies. Travellers may note that both have one or more gunshot wounds to the head and that overkill has occurred. In fact some of the boarders put an extra round into their victims as they passed.

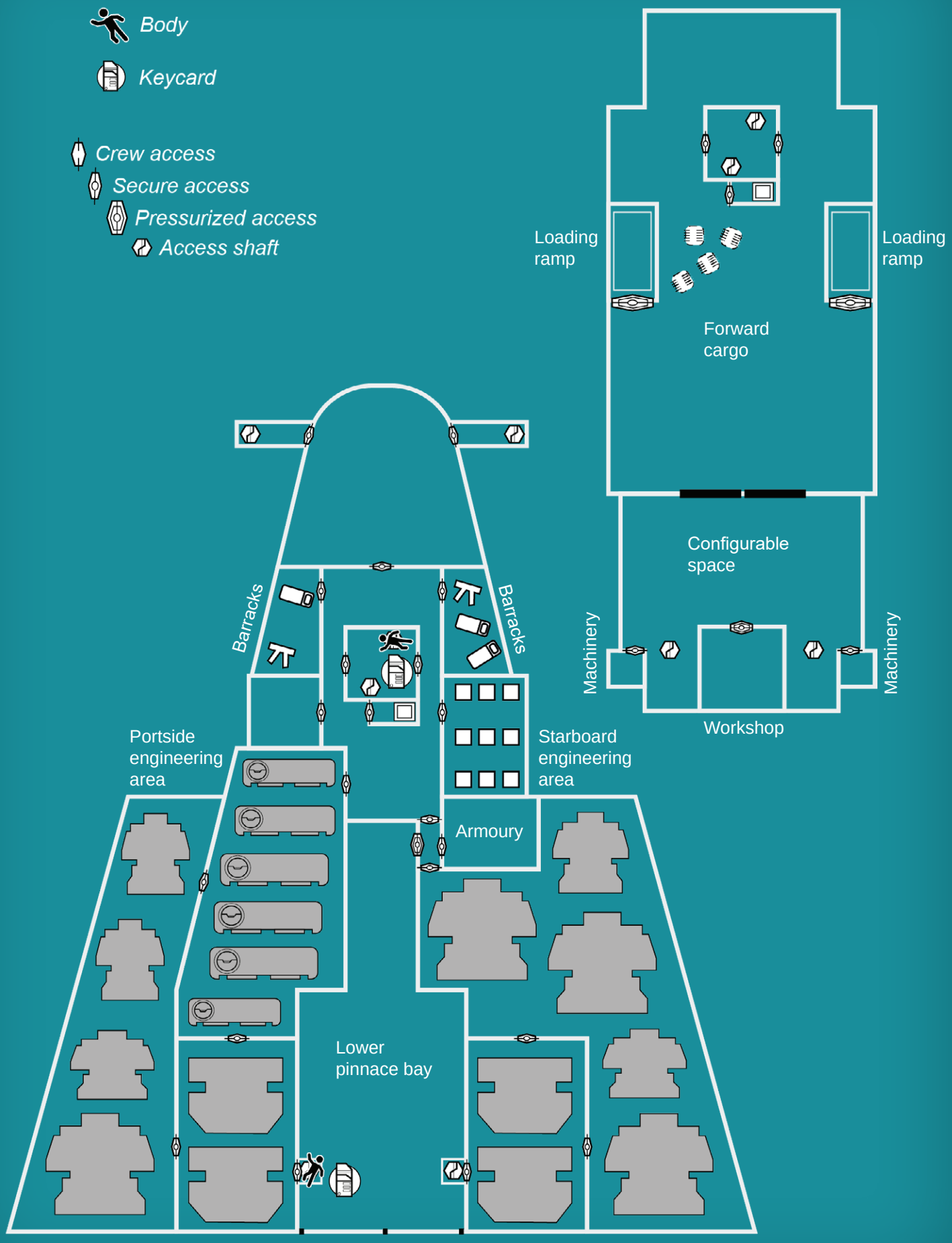
There is further evidence of violence in the mess hall, although this was more of a fight. Sir Hamex and his two bodyguards were talking to the ship's captain and some of his crew when they heard gunshots. Fellow crewmembers would have hesitated to shoot when a comrade came into the chamber but the bodyguards did not. They opened fire with light, compact submachineguns and hit some of the attackers. Two were killed in the exchange along with some of the crew but they bought time for the captain and Sir Hamex, both wounded, to escape. They retreated forward and used the between-decks access panels to flee to C deck. A couple of other crewmembers got the pilot to the bridge where they activated the security lockouts. They grabbed guns from the armoury and tried to find other survivors. From this point on there were multiple armed people hunting one another throughout the ship.

C DECK

C deck is the widest of the main decks. It contains the lower half of the pinnace bay and the vessel's engineering spaces as well as the marine barracks. One peculiarity of the class is that the engineering spaces are split and are located on opposite sides of the pinnace bay which makes it difficult to pass quickly from one to the other. Both engineering areas are accessible from the decks above and below, using shafts sealed at either end by iris valves.

Typically only engineering crew and marines, as well as the missile technicians and gunners, require access to this deck. Normally Specialist level access would be granted but since this vessel has not yet been commissioned Crew access is sufficient for most areas.

1. Marine Armoury
2. Marine Barracks
3. Sick Bay
4. Access Chamber and Stores
5. Power Plant
6. Jump Drive
7. Port side Manoeuvre Drive
8. Starboard side Manoeuvre Drive
9. Port Access Shaft
10. Starboard Access Shaft
11. Port Missile Storage
12. Port Missile Turret
13. Starboard Missile Storage
14. Starboard Missile Turret


Body
Keycard
Crew access
Secure access
Pressurized access
Access shaft
Loading ramp
Loading ramp
Forward cargo
Configurable space
Machinery
Machinery
Workshop
Barracks
Barracks
Portside engineering area
Starboard engineering area
Armoury
Lower pinnace bay

DECK C AND D

C DECK FORWARD

The forward part of C deck is unsecured. The marine armoury and barracks were incomplete and have been trashed by impact with the ground. There is some distortion of the deck and bulkheads as well. This area was cursorily searched by the hijackers, who then moved on. They noted that someone had snatched some basic medical supplies but failed to notice the ship's captain, whose unconscious body was hidden in the lower deck access tunnel. He died there, his keycard still on his person.

C DECK AFT

The engineering spaces normally need Specialist or higher access but this has been over-ridden using the first officer's keycard. Doors must still be manually activated. Warned by other crewmembers, the ship's engineer was able to escape through the access shafts to D deck. She was still trying to find a place to hide or a way to fight back when the ship impacted, critically injuring her. Her body lies somewhere between the engineering spaces and D deck with her card on her person.

Sir Hamex Calston is strapped into the portside gunner's chair. He was brought here, severely wounded, by his surviving bodyguard after evading the hijackers by way of D deck. He has two gunshot wounds which have received cursory treatment and is in a critical condition.

D DECK

D Deck is mostly given over to stowage and cargo, although some of this space can be repurposed. Cargo is loaded by way of a ramp that can be dropped between the forward landing feet, enabling the forward cargo area to act as a vehicle garage. The fuel scoops can be accessed by way of hatches at the sides of the forward cargo area. Crew-level access is all that is normally required for this deck.

1. Forward Cargo Area
2. Fuel Scoop Machinery
3. Fuel Scoop Machinery
4. Workshop and Stowage
5. Access shaft to C Deck
6. Cargo/Configurable Space

D DECK FORWARD

Routine access to the ship, other than for officers and important visitors, was by way of the forward cargo ramp. It is now buckled and distorted. There are a few boxes of mission supplies in this area but it is otherwise empty.

D DECK AFT

The aft part of this deck is less damaged than the forward end and served as a refuge for those who managed to escape the initial surprise attack. The hijackers did attempt to breach this area but came under submachinegun fire from the surviving bodyguard. They decided to retreat to the pinnace at this point as the ship was clearly descending out of control. The bodyguard managed to get his charge back up to C deck and concealed him in the missile stowage area whilst he hunted down any surviving hijackers.

PLAYING OUT THE ADVENTURE

Most of the crew and the hijackers were killed or seriously injured in the fight and the crash. Some of the Zhodani agents escaped in the pinnace and will return now the wreck is on the ground. As the Travellers search the ship they will find evidence of a fight and may encounter survivors. How these react depends on circumstances. The crew do not know why they were attacked, and having been betrayed by comrades they had known for months or years they will be wary and defensive. Zhodani survivors may approach the Travellers as if they are glad to be rescued, or may observe and seek an opportunity for an ambush. Surviving crewmembers may not know which of the others are traitors but the Zhodani agents are all aware of one another's true allegiance.

The Referee should keep in mind that the ship still has power but is under emergency/combat protocols so access to some parts is restricted to those with clearance. Gaining keycards or bypassing the ship's security will give access to secure areas. There is also light, air recycling and life support in the ship. It would be possible to take a hot shower or cook a meal, and in some parts of the ship there are no real signs that anything has happened. Others are, in the parlance of the spacefaring community, 'comprehensively trashed'.

The adventure should play out as a tense and perhaps creepy search of the ship, with the Travellers piecing together what has happened along the way. They may have to reassure or negotiate with survivors and will need to find one of the Command level keycards to get access to the bridge. Once they have done that they can set up access for themselves or disable the security lockdown in a similar manner to how they would manage security aboard their own ship. Eventually they will find Sir Hamex Calston and may realise there is something afoot here.

The Travellers may or may not be attacked by Zhodani survivors during the investigation stage of the adventure. If that happens, it is best played out as a series of fleeting encounters, not all of them violent and perhaps not all with enemies. Someone runs past the end of a corridor and scrambles into a maintenance hatch leading into the between-deck tunnels. Was that the same person who fired at the Travellers across the pinnace bay or someone else? The Travellers might encounter traps, or walk right past what seems to be another fatality but is in fact a Zhodani agent playing possum. The Zhodani are dedicated enough to risk an attack on a group that has 'rescued' one of their number, accepting that hitting a fellow agent is a necessary hazard.

Eventually, the pinnace returns. After escaping, the Zhodani agents went back to their base to decide what to do and agreed to make another attempt on the ship. They will land beside the wreck and enter, intending to eliminate anyone inside and capture Sir Hamex if he is still alive. They may pose as a rescue party. The Travellers' ship will be bypassed for the time being but the agents view it as their ticket out of the system so will plan to capture some of the Travellers in order to force them to hand over the ship. If they can, the agents will try to dupe the Travellers into cooperating with them until they are taken aboard the prototype. The traitors include the ship's first officer, who still has her Command level access card.

The adventure will probably climax with a fight between the Travellers and the Zhodani agents aboard the wreck or perhaps their own ship. The Travellers can expect no mercy and will be kept alive only as long as they are compliant and useful. No Zhodani agent will confess to their real identity and there is nothing to indicate their true allegiance either on their person or at their camp. The Travellers may leave Fulacin without knowing who brought down the ship or why. Subsequent events may give them a strong clue, however.

OPPOSITION AND ALLIES

There are some survivors aboard the wreck and the Zhodani agents will return at some point. Exactly how many survivors or opponents there are is up to the Referee but it is advisable to keep numbers small to avoid having to keep track of multiple people.

CREWMEMBERS

Legitimate crewmembers will be confused, frightened and angry at the betrayal of their trust. They will try to hide or avoid anyone they do not know and will generally be seeking to get into the bridge area and send a distress signal. This requires Command level access, which means finding the captain or the engineer's body. Some crewmembers may know where they are but be too afraid or simply unable to get there. They will be grudging or ineffectual allies for the most part, and quite probably know less than the Travellers about what happened and why.

TYPICAL CREWMEMBER

STR 6 **DEX** 8 **END** 7 **INT** 9 **EDU** 8 **SOC** 7
Melee 0, various shipboard skills

Weapons: Something that can be used as a club (2D), possibly Autopistol (3D-3)
Equipment: Tools, medical supplies, whatever they could grab

ZHODANI AGENTS

Some of the Zhodani agents are dressed as crewmembers. Others wear typical planetside working garb. All are dedicated to their cause and will stalk the Travellers or try to befriend them as seems most likely to lead to success. They may bide their time, waiting for a chance to strike, or try to eliminate the opposition whenever they can.

ZHODANI OPERATIVE

STR 7 **DEX** 9 **END** 8 **INT** 7 **EDU** 7 **SOC** 6
Gun Combat (slug) 2, Persuade 1, Stealth 1

Weapons: Autopistol (3D-3) or Shotgun (4D)
Equipment: Possibly some tools

BODYGUARD

One bodyguard survived the attack and possibly the crash too. If alive, he is currently sneaking around the wreck trying to find weapons and ammunition to

eliminate the hijackers. He may assume the Travellers are hostile and will certainly not trust random strangers who have just turned up. However, he may decide to take a chance if the alternative is letting Sir Hamex die.

BODYGUARD

STR 8 **DEX** 9 **END** 9 **INT** 6 **EDU** 6 **SOC** 6
Gun Combat (slug) 2, Melee (unarmed) 1, Recon 1

Weapons: Guardian Compact Submachinegun (3D-1) or whatever else he has found
Equipment: Possibly some tools

SIR HAMEX CALSTON

Sir Hamex Calston is badly hurt, having taken two gunshots and ridden through a starship crash with nothing but a padded seat to protect him. He is badly frightened but is also a career naval officer and an Imperial noble. He knows how to put on a brave face. He is of course suspicious of his rescuers and will not divulge sensitive information but may have to make a deal to get himself out of the present situation.

The meeting with General Products was illegal, illicit and fairly typical of how business is done in certain quarters. Naval procurement is big money and those who get results for the right clients are assured of additional power and prestige. Sir Hamex Calston is willing to saddle the navy with an inferior ship it does not want if that furthers his own career and his family's fortune. However, he is corrupt rather than traitorous.

If the Travellers can present Sir Hamex with a way out of the situation he will be in their debt and could be a very useful contact in the future. If he understands their mission he will offer to fast-track the Travellers to a meeting with the subsector admirals for Lanth and Rhylanor, which would be an excellent opportunity to present their ship. RVSC never dreamed this would be possible, so the Travellers could greatly exceed expectations if they are willing to play along.

Sir Hamex' idea is that the Travellers 'rescued' him from a hijack attempt on his yacht. If the vessel turns up he will deal with any conflicting stories. It would be best not to be caught in the vicinity of the present incident since he was not supposed to be there at all but what if the yacht was attacked in some backwater, say the Dinom system, by members of a rebellion going on there? The Travellers swooped in with their excellent ship and bravely rescued Sir Hamex. Nobody knows anything about a missing General Products ship and everyone benefits!

He can be bargained into paying large amounts of money for silence but his offer is probably a better one. Extorting money will make him an Enemy of the Travellers, whilst working with him could produce great results later and does not antagonise him. He may be useful if the Travellers need information and he knows some very rich people who respect discretion and resourcefulness. Alternatively, the Travellers might just turn him over to the authorities and watch him try to explain why he was in the Fulacin system at all. That might lead to them having to answer some difficult questions, however.

COMMODORE SIR HAMEX CALSTON

Sir Hamex Calston is slightly overweight and physically lazy by inclination, although his mind moves at an alarming pace. He comes from an 'old navy' family of minor nobility and followed a typical career path for such people. Graduating naval academy he served for a time aboard cruisers and capital ships before moving into a staff role at various naval bases. Sir Hamex has not been part of a warship crew since his sublieutenant days, although none can deny the work he does is important to the navy.

From administration of the supply chain, Sir Hamex progressed into starship and component procurement, a role that required close liaison with manufacturers and designers. He has been one of the senior officers dealing with procurement for the Lanth and Rhylanor fleets for some years now and is generally very effective. However, there is a lot of money involved in what he does and helping someone important make money is the key to greater prestige as a noble. At some point in the past couple of years Sir Hamex became more concerned about his noble status than his duty to the Imperial Navy.

There are some complex and cross-cutting agendas among the nobility of the Spinward Marches and some powerful people want the Improved Kinunir adopted for service. Their reasons vary – some have invested in the project, others have a deeper agenda. Better security along the frontiers is beneficial to trade but it also makes the people who made it happen look good… and it might help persuade the sector commander to move some battleships to deployments they want.

COMMODORE SIR HAMEX CALSTON

STR 4 **DEX** 5 **END** 4 **INT** 12 **EDU** 11 **SOC** 10
Admin 4, Diplomat 3, Profession (naval architect) 2, Vacc Suit 1

Armour: Vacc Suit (+10)

Sir Hamex is part of a group of nobles who support the Duchess of Mora in her bid to become sector duke. He hopes to receive a barony when he leaves naval service and to that end is pushing her agenda. However, he is not disloyal. He believes, or has convinced himself, that the Improved Kinunir really is the ship the subsector fleets need and feels no shame about receiving favours and thinly disguised bribed in return for backing it.

The meeting with the General Products crew at Fulacin was supposed to finalise Sir Hamex' backing for the vessel with a semi-plausible story about being impressed by one of these excellent ships at a chance encounter. He now needs to find an explanation for why he was aboard the vessel when it was hijacked. It will be easy enough to distance himself from the incident providing he can get far enough away and perhaps produce some witnesses to the 'attack' on his yacht somewhere else.

Sir Hamex is worried about the consequences for himself rather than the Kinunir crew or the navy in general but after a while he begins to see a way through all of this. If the Travellers will go along with his plan he gets himself out of the investigation and will be able to cite the fact that even an Imperial Knight cannot travel in safety as a reason why the subsector fleets should adopt the Improved Kinunir as soon as possible.

AFTERMATH

The Travellers are sort of in possession of a vessel owned by General Products. 'Sort of' refers to the fact that it is useless except as a source of spares and scrap in its present condition and since there were survivors aboard the Travellers do not have salvage rights. The vessel legally still belongs to General Products. They are also in contact with Sir Hamex Calston or his bodyguard. He is not just an Imperial noble; he is an important figure in warship procurement for the local subsector fleets. Discovery of his off-books meeting with the General Products crew could be problematic.

There are multiple ways all of this can play out, but some matters are more pressing than others. Fulacin has a Class A starport and a system defence squadron. The incident went unnoticed at first due to the fact both ships involved were trying to remain undetected and the storm prevented the crash from being immediately noticed. The yacht did not transmit a distress call as its crew knew it needed to jump immediately in order to avoid being blasted to atoms. Perhaps the vessel or its wreckage will turn up somewhere else, which will raise questions. In the meantime, as the storm clears the wreck will be sighted at some point. What appears to be a downed navy ship will certainly attract attention.

Rescue ships will be sent almost immediately and if the Travellers' ship is sighted near the wreck it will be intercepted by the system defence flotilla and any naval ships that happen to be in-system. Attempting to flee will result in the Travellers being fired upon by the navy; they are unlikely to survive. If they somehow evade interception or destruction their vessel will be flagged as a possible hostile and they face the same response in all Imperial star systems the news has reached.

In this event, the mission is scuppered. The authorities do not immediately know who was on board but they will find out quickly enough. The RVSC personnel aboard will want to surrender to the authorities and actually have the means to force that to happen. The Travellers will face protest and

possible resistance if they decide to flee anyway and if they do their best option would be to run for the border. They might find safe haven in the Federation of Arden. This means they are outlaws known to have been involved in the loss of a megacorporate ship which was of interest to the Imperial Navy. Their futures could become quite interesting…

If the Travellers wait for or surrender to the authorities they will be disarmed and detained, and questioned at great length. However, this is more about determining facts than finding something for the Travellers to be guilty of. So long as their stories match each other and the security camera footage available they will, more than likely, be determined to have done the right thing. They detected a crashed ship and tried to assist despite the storm; there is nothing wrong with that. They do not seem to have any connection to the hijackers and fought against them… again, these are worthy actions.

There are a couple of ticklish subjects to deal with, however. How did the Travellers detect the crash when nobody else did? Examination of their sensor data is as confusing to the local investigators as to the Travellers themselves. If they can give a plausible answer the matter will not be pursued further. The big questions are about who the hijackers were and why Sir Hamex was present. 'We don't know' is a perfectly plausible answer that fits the known facts, so despite rigorous questioning the Travellers do not have much to fear. They will not be able to keep anything taken from the wreck, however, as it belongs to General Products.

The Travellers can avoid all these complications by leaving the crash site under cover of the storm. They have a few hours before the wreck becomes visible from orbit; long enough to search the ship and perhaps remove a few pieces of plunder before quietly leaving the system. If they do so they will leave behind a mystery providing they get rid of the wreck's security footage and sensor records. If not, the Imperial authorities will want to question them and/or the owners of the prototype and will detain the Travellers at some point in the future if they can. This looks more suspicious than if the Travellers just cooperated but ultimately they can be shown to have done the right thing and are unlikely to be charged with any offence.

The wreck will be secured as far as possible and a team from General Products will come to remove everything they can. After this, the most likely fate is for the wreck to be broken up by a commercial salvage team. If the Travellers visit the Wildcatter settlement they will find evidence of long-term occupation and hastily covered-up indications of violence such as bullet impacts in the walls. All bodies, bloodstains and the like have been removed.

Personal effects are still present, although data-storage devices were destroyed or removed. If the Travellers take a good look around they will notice several printouts of maps showing parts of Fulacin. There are courses and timings noted on them which correspond to wide-ranging flights in an air/raft. This is odd for prospectors, who would more commonly be thorough in exploring a small region then moving their base of operations. It is more in keeping with exploration.

A nearby mine shaft has recently collapsed, and if excavated would be found to contain the bdies of several Wildcatters along with everything missing from the settlement other than a few personnel and their weapons. Explosives were used to collapse the shaft. It will be obvious that this was an organised group, but there are no indications about their allegiance or ultimate purpose.

The Travellers may be left with more questions than answers but there are a few solid facts to work on. A noble and naval officer met with a General Products team in a manner that suggests this was not an official encounter. From this it may be possible to infer that General Products is trying to rig the procurement process to get ships adopted by the local subsector fleets, perhaps as part of a wider plan to push for adoption Imperium-wide.

The attack is more of a mystery. It seems to have been an inside job but it is not clear whether the ship or the noble was the target. The Travellers will have to ponder this one as there is no clear and obvious answer. What they do know is that someone had agents on Fulacin for a long time. What might they have been waiting for? If the Travellers know the Wildcatters were undertaking long exploration flights they might wonder if they were looking for something. There is no indication of what that might be.

THE SPINWARD MAIN

The Travellers have a meeting scheduled at Dinom, eight parsecs from Fulacin. By refuelling at K'Kirka they could get there in a little over two weeks. They may also have Sir Hamex aboard and if so Dinom would be a good place to 'rescue' him. The meeting was set up months ago and is not scheduled for a particular place and time. Instead, the Travellers' contact knows a delegation is on its way and will arrange a meeting as soon as possible after the Travellers arrive.

The Travellers are thus not bound to a schedule and could wend their way slowly along the Spinward Main if they chose. They will notice a few things during their voyage, even if they move as quickly as they can. Peculiarities with the Autocrew system will be making themselves felt by this point, although serious trouble will not have occurred. The Travellers may also notice the odd sensor glitch, as if the system was picking up more data than it should or was receiving a conflicting data feed. Going back over recorded signals will not reveal any external source for this additional data.

The Travellers may also take note of the traffic along the main. Vessels large and small ply the main, mostly turning coreward at Dinom towards Regina and perhaps Efate. A smaller proportion of vessels proceeds towards Arden, with few indeed making the whole run into Zhodani space to turn around at Sansibar. The vast majority of vessels on the Spinward Main are Imperial registered but there are some that use Arden as a flag of convenience or are actually based there. Zhodani vessels are relatively rare and those that are sighted on the Spinward Main are usually capable of more than jump-1. Chugging along the spacelanes is the cheapest way to move goods but vessels trading in the space of another great power tend to be carrying high-value items and will benefit from getting them to market quickly.

Some worlds on the main have quite poor starports. A quick glance at the starcharts suggests that jump-1 vessels that cannot land on a planetary surface will not be able to pass Vriebefger, Pirema, Rech or Dinom. This is in fact not the case. The starport code refers to the quality of the mainworld starport but the economic benefits of a jump-1 main are such that alternative fuelling installations were set up with Imperial funding. These are rather basic, consisting of old navy tankers kept topped up by shuttles skimming the system's gas giants. With only minimal facilities these are not starports but they are vital to the regional economy.

One unintended consequence of setting up these fuelling stations was to further stunt the growth of the mainworld economy. With no need to visit the port, most ships simply refuel and move on. The mainworld therefore receives less trade and cannot make money from services at the port. Some populations feel this is unfair but since they never had the money to build a 'proper' starport they could not have gained these benefits. There have been various initiatives aimed at upgrading the poorest ports on the main but thus far it has been more cost-effective to provide fuel and let the mainworld look to its own affairs.

If the Travellers want to visit worlds along the way they can of course do so. All manner of side trips and adventures are possible but there is only one scripted encounter. This can be inserted at any suitable point.

SENSOR GLITCH

As the Travellers are passing through one of the systems on their route, their sensors pick up a faint set of emissions. These are off the main inbound and outbound jump-to-port lanes and not likely to be a vessel headed for another planet. Travellers with naval experience will know that this is the sort of place where navy warships quietly lurk – and so do raiders. Sometimes the navy wants its ships to be seen, acting as a deterrent and reassuring trade ships. On other occasions it may be beneficial to hide and see how the traffic behaves when it seems like there is no enforcement going on.

There are various reasons why a warship might be behaving this way. It is a routine pirate-trap technique, which some civilians object to as they feel they are being used as bait. If this is the case, there is probably no special alert in progress. However, sometimes a

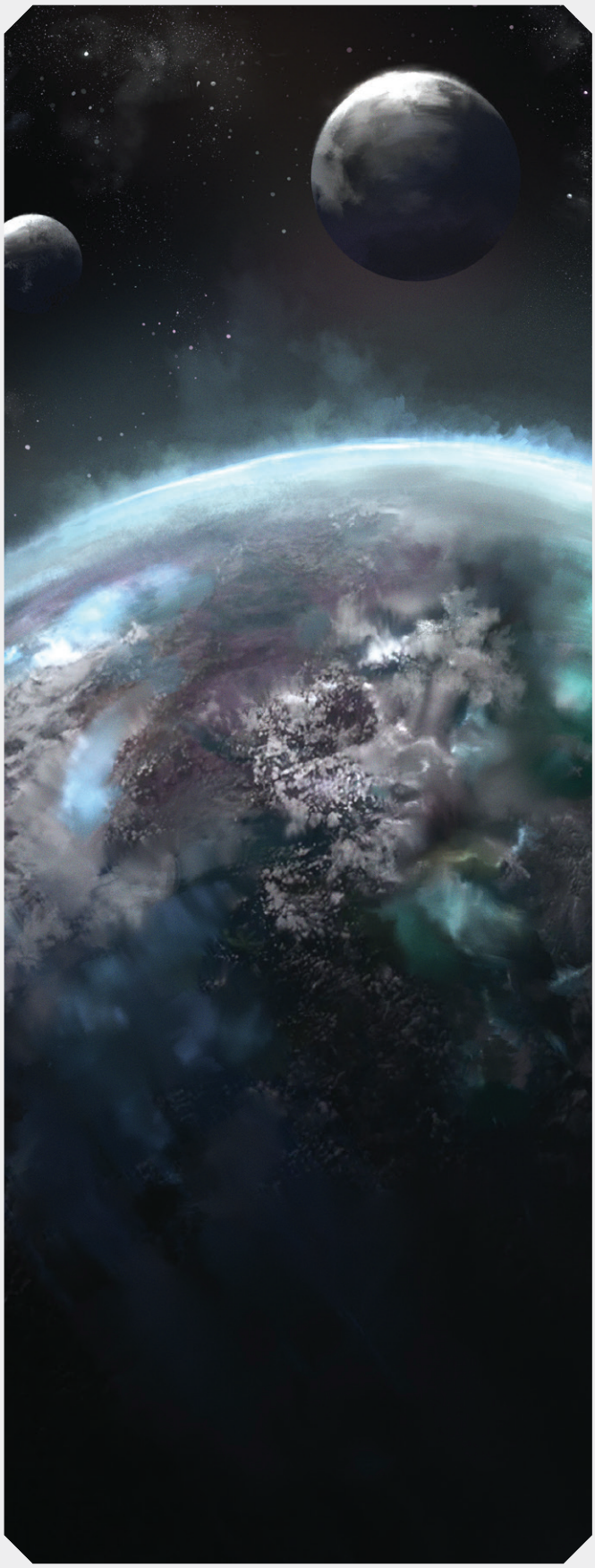
route might be covertly observed for a specific reason. A spate of pirate attacks is the likely cause, or the suspicion that a dangerous criminal might be trying to move through that system.

What is peculiar about this detection is that although this vessel is producing minimal emissions and does not respond to transponder pings, the Travellers' sensors are producing a lot of data from somewhere. This resolves itself into a familiar looking table after a few moments.

VESSEL TYPE: Kinunir-class 100% Confidence.
VESSEL IDENTITY: *Enki Kalamma*.
LOCATION: Coordinates Available.
CONDITION: Operational, observing EMCON status.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Weapons unpowered.
ANALYSIS: Vessel has adopted covert observation status. No combat alert in progress.

The information disappears after a moment and cannot be retrieved, leaving the Travellers with questions. They may wonder how their sensor system could tell so much about a military vessel which has not even revealed its presence. The system has even attempted to identify the ship from its emissions. Whilst all vessels have unique emissions the differences between well-maintained ships of the same class are tiny. It is not clear how the Travellers' ship has produced this information. Since Autocrew has begun glitching, the Travellers might wonder if this is connected. They are not wrong; problems with Autocrew have interfered with the naval intelligence package aboard their ship. However, they will not find any sign of it even if they suspect the presence of some additional electronic system.

It would be unwise to acknowledge the presence of the warship. It is operating under Emission Control (EMCON) status and should not be detectable to passing civilian vessels. Acknowledging the vessel demonstrates the Travellers have exceptionally good sensors and the skill to use them, which will pique the interest of the patrol ship. The Travellers' vessel will be stopped and searched, and they will be subject to questioning about how they detected the Kinunir and their business in the area. This could go awry but if the Travellers are not foolish and have not left evidence of criminality lying around they will eventually be cleared to proceed.



DINOM

The Dinom system is named for its primary, a very hot, bright giant star which long ago destroyed most of its planetary system. All that remained was a gas giant and its satellites, which were perturbed out of their orbits. All but one were ejected from the system or swallowed by the star. The survivor, now named Dinom as the de facto mainworld of the system, was captured at the gas giant's trailing Trojan point.

Dinom has a 1,600-year orbital period. At present its north pole is pointed more or less directly at the star, creating a situation whereby one face of the planet is permanently 'bright' and the other permanently 'cold'. Precession will gradually alter this but for the next couple of centuries the faces will endure extreme opposite conditions. The world's atmosphere of methane and carbon dioxide is frozen on the cold face and was boiled away into space on the bright face. The only permanent habitation is in the twilight zone between the two.

It was never a good prospect for colonisation and for many years the only presence in the system was a refuelling station orbiting the gas giant. The discovery of rich mineral resources resulted in the creation of three 'corp towns' named Rhylan, Medianne and Napan. These attracted some secondary settlement as new arrivals opened businesses to cater to the miners and ore processing workers. The population has reached 230,000 and is unlikely to grow much more.

Dinom does not really have a planetary government as such. Each of the cities is run by a board of directors who answer to the shareholders of the mining and ore processing companies. Workers and non-shareholders receive little representation at any level, creating an effective oligarchy. Offworld affairs are the responsibility of the World Board, which meets in Rhylan. Theoretically responsible for system security and related matters, the board is primarily concerned with ensuring offworld events do not impact the shareholders' profits.

DINOM

Profile	**D300535-A**	
Starport	D	Poor
Size	3	4,800km
Atmosphere	0	No atmosphere
Hydrosphere	0	Desert World
Population	5	Hundreds of thousands
Government Type	3	Self-Perpetuating Oligarchy
Law Level	5	Personal concealable weapons prohibited
Technology Level	10	Interstellar community

The situation on Dinom naturally produces some resentment, which has traditionally been appeased with better salaries or slight improvements in working conditions. However, in recent months unrest has been increasing. Sabotage and threats of violence were met with a crackdown using offworld security personnel but rather than suppressing the unrest this measure has triggered an open revolt. By no means all the workers of Dinom are involved but a great many are engaging in passive resistance, civil disobedience, go-slows or strikes. A smaller number are in open rebellion and have in some cases taken control of outlying installations or sectors of the cities. The World Board of Dinom is downplaying the situation to its own people and outsiders alike… putting a bright face on things, if you will.

THE BRIGHT FACE

Even far from the system's primary, things are hot and bright. The Travellers' sensors are subject to interference as soon as they arrive in the Dinom system. Most interstellar traffic bypasses the mainworld, refuelling at a station orbiting the gas giant before leaving as quickly as possible. The majority of ships approaching the mainworld are freighters on contract to pick up shipments of refined ore for transportation to industrial worlds. Those arriving normally carry bulk foods for the masses and luxuries for the elite. Speculative trade in a port like this is usually unprofitable but there will always be the odd trader willing to chance it. Otherwise, all the mainworld port would ever see is shuttles from orbiting freighters.

There is no traffic in orbit or close to Dinom when the Travellers arrive and interference from the star imposes DM-1 on sensor and communications tasks. Occasionally there are sensor ghosts or erroneous data which might make the Travellers think their sensor system is acting up again. Heading in towards Dinom should be uneventful despite this, although the automated traffic control system carries an advisory that there is unrest on-planet and that personnel should be cautious outside the landing area.

The three cities of Dinom all lie on the equator, in the twilight zone. They are connected by a bright ribbon which any data terminal can tell the Travellers is an enclosed monorail system. It was intended to circumnavigate the planet, although the project ran into difficulties and is unfinished. The cities themselves are blocky and set low, with complexes of sealed buildings linked by transitways. A ring of ore processing works and vehicle maintenance facilities surrounds each and as the Travellers approach they will see vehicles – ATVs and heavy load carriers for the most part – moving between the city and its industrial installations. Other vehicles are far out from the cities, headed for small installations or engaged in prospecting work for the most part.

The starport is little more than a ring of landing pads around a central terminal, all contained within a large impact crater. Each pad can take a ship of up to 1,000 tons or slightly more if the pilot is careful and has large ore-loading gantries close by. A semi-underground monorail link runs through the crater wall into the city proper. As the Travellers approach they will detect a ship on one of the pads and a couple of small craft on another. There is no other activity.

The ship is of a familiar type; an Argacan multipurpose vessel whose transponder states it belongs to General Products and is named *Bright Face*. Attempts at contact get an automated reply but there is more than likely no-one aboard. Similarly, the traffic control system tells the Travelers their arrival has been noted but does not engage in conversation. If it were not for the vehicles they passed over on the way in, the Travellers might think they were approaching a dead world.

ARRIVING ON DINOM

Disembarking from the ship requires the Travellers to don vacc suits and walk to the terminal entrance at the edge of the landing pad. Most basic ports at least have a pressurised boarding tunnel or vehicles to allow new arrivals to dress comfortably but Dinom's World Board sees no reason to spend money unnecessarily. Once inside the terminal the Travellers can rent lockers for their suits and change into something more comfortable if they like. Weapons must be placed in the lockers as well – Dinom has an overall Law Level of 5 but does not permit anyone but security personnel to carry weapon in the cities.

Finally the Travellers meet some actual people; a team of bored and underworked terminal staff and security guards. The latter are armed with handguns and batons, and wear the same uniform as the rest of the world's security force. They are neither motivated nor particularly competent but do insist the Travellers pass through a TL9 weapons scanner. After a lackadaisical repeat of the warning about unrest the Travellers are waved through.

A rail car is waiting for the Travellers. It passes through a tunnel in the crater wall and underground for a kilometre or so then surfaces for the last few hundred metres. An airlocked section of track leads to a station which is mostly automated. There is no startown as such since Dinom receives few visitors but there are a couple of hotels nearby. One, the Dinom Excellence, is obviously far upmarket of the other. Since the Travellers are on expenses and are expected to live a certain lifestyle, it is the obvious choice.

Hotel rooms come with a business package, which amounts to use of a small office and the chance to rent a larger conferencing suite when required. It is a small matter for the Travellers to upload a notice of their arrival to the business databases and within seconds they receive a reply from the office of the World Board. This is automated, like almost everything else so far, and amounts to a promise that a meeting will be scheduled as soon as possible. This is almost immediately followed by a personal call from someone who appears to be bouncing around in an all-terrain vehicle.

The caller introduces himself as Chief Executive Arlent Streen, currently responsible for in-system craft operations and related matters. The World Board is primarily interested in procuring a flotilla of shuttles to better move ore between the surface and visiting freighters. However, good offers are always welcome. He is authorised to discuss other related matters, including the purchase of one or more transport starships and even an expansion to the port. He is about to visit an ore processing plant that is having some problems, so will have to either schedule a conference call for this evening or meet in person in a few days when he gets back to Rhylan. Either way, the Travellers will need to find something to do in the meantime.

WANDERING AROUND

If the Travellers decide to take in the sights and experience the vibrant recreation scene in Rhylan they will be very disappointed. Most of the people on the streets are sullen and wary of strangers, and there are a lot of security personnel around. Some of these are similar to the starport staff whilst others, although wearing the same uniform, seem to be offworlders. This impression is correct; the World Board greatly expanded its security force without being very choosy about professionalism and training. The Board trusts its hired thugs more than most of the planetary security force, which means that experienced security officers are often overruled by less competent offworlders.

The Travellers will witness multiple instances of people being stopped and questioned or even searched without any apparent reason or cause. They may themselves stopped and required to identify and account for themselves, although this is far less likely if they are well dressed. People in suits or uniforms seem to be more or less invisible to the security patrols and are treated with courtesy when there is an interaction. The Travellers will not witness wanton brutality but there is an undercurrent of mistrust and fear throughout local society.

One other thing is apparent; all the good bars and restaurants charge a large entry fee, although this is usually taken as a deposit against equally expensive services. Those with less to spend must console themselves with downmarket establishments, which are often within view of the good ones. The Travellers may observe an interesting facet of Dinom's society. Those who want to be elevated into the monied upper echelons are expected to act like they already are members. They will spend large amounts of money they cannot afford to get into the right bars and events. A few might make the right contacts and get a better job through them but most just funnel their money upwards. Anyone able to fund the lifestyle required to be noticed and accepted into the upper echelons is already rich enough to be a member.

The Travellers do not have to worry about this too much; they have a deep expenses account. However, the upper-echelon facilities are not always pleasant. They are likely to be filled with well-off people judging everyone to see if they are worth interacting with and desperate fake-well-off people hoping to make the right friends before the cash runs out. Backstabbing, toadying and bullying are commonplace. The Travellers might or might not be uncomfortable in this environment but either way it offers an insight into why there is unrest on Dinom.

INVESTIGATING THE GENERAL PRODUCTS SHIP

Public records show that the General Products ship *Bright Face* is on contract to the World Board for 'general transport duties'. This suggests it has been involved in bringing in additional security personnel, which would be a generally correct assumption. This is not why *Bright Face* was sent to Dinom; she was named for the world and targeted at clients there. Her crew were instructed to generally make themselves useful and promote General Products.

It is possible that the World Board might be induced to buy some craft or even starships but that is a long shot. The General team are primarily concerned with trying to get contracts for heavy machinery or perhaps a construction project to improve the starport. The crew of *Bright Face* will not disclose this but it may be possible to make some deductions. A number of pieces of General Products heavy equipment have been brought to Dinom for demonstration purposes. The Travellers may become aware of them from favourable slanted news reports or vivid criticism of 'plans to further marginalise the workforce' by adopting a new wave of megacorporate job-stealers.

The General Products team have been the subject of a fair amount of publicity since their arrival. The official media hosts demonstrations of their great equipment and excellent starship, and promises a more prosperous future for everyone when General Products invests in Dinom. Fringe channels present the same story rather differently – more prosperity for the wealthy and more security officers on the streets to keep the workforce down.

The Travellers may be able to deduce the General Products involvement in Dinom from all this without going near the crew. If they do seek them out, they can be found in the bar of the Dinom Excellence or one of the better nearby entertainment venues. They come over as a lot less arrogant than the crew of the *Prime Example* and are happy to share a few drinks with the Travellers providing they appear to be of equivalent social status – the General Products team are also on show here. Some of the crew seem happy enough to have desperate locals toadying to them, whilst others look uncomfortable. All have a job to do however, and that job involves finding out why the Travellers are here. Any interaction will be underlaid by corporate rivalry and information-gathering.

Soon after the Travellers arrive on Dinom, the General Products vessel lifts off on some errand. If the Travellers have agreed to Sir Hamex' plan he will be aboard the vessel. If not, the ship is still sent out of the system and is unavailable to take part in the events unfolding on Dinom.

SIR HAMEX CALSTON

If Sir Hamex is with the Travellers, Dinom is a perfect place to part ways with him. He suggests the Travellers let him approach the General Products crew with a proposal – the Imperial Navy will pay a hefty reward to them for getting him home and he will match it with a payment to the Travellers when he has access to his family's money. This way the awkward details of the situation can be quietly glossed over. He will tell a story of how his yacht was attacked somewhere other than Fulacin, covering up his illicit meeting with General Products. He will owe the Travellers a big favour for this, and for their discretion about the matter and will repay them over time.

If the Travellers are agreeable, Sir Hamex will contact the General Products crew, who readily agree to give him passage home. They depart soon afterward, somewhat to the annoyance of the World Board who still have work for them. The Travellers may correctly assume that General Products has promised to compensate the World Board for the loss of 'their' ship for a few weeks.

INVESTIGATING THE SITUATION ON DINOM

The planetary datanets are heavily controlled by the mining companies on Dinom and are downplaying the rebellion as just some troublemakers rioting and looting for the fun of it. The official line is that the companies are addressing worker grievances as best they can and doing a pretty good job of it, but their efforts are hampered by people with an agenda. Depending on which news channel the Travellers watch the real culprits are either Ine Givar terrorists or Zhodani agents, although at no point is any actual proof presented.

Digging through the fringes of the mainstream news, the Travellers will discern a different picture. It appears that there is a full-scale revolt going on. Rhylan is well secured, as are most parts of the two other cities. However, Medianne and Napan have both seen running street battles between angry workers and security personnel. These are riots rather than revolts but there does seem to be what amounts to guerrilla warfare going on outside the cities. Some settlements and installations appear to have been taken over by the rebels, with amateurish efforts to retake them generally ending in failure.

Neither side really knows what they are doing. The rebels are just miners and prospectors who are tired of mistreatment and the security forces have little experience of anything bigger than a bar fight. Snippets of illicit footage show raids to sabotage equipment and the occasional carcass of an ATV holed by a mining laser or blown off its wheels by an improvised explosive charge. The amount of straight-out fighting that has taken place is rather small, however. The situation might best be described as severe social unrest with a small rebellion taking place alongside it.

A CONVERSATION WITH ARLENT STREEN

Later in the day, the Travellers are informed they have an incoming conference call from Executive Arlent Streen. If they have done some research on him they will know that – according to public records – he is a powerful mining magnate who has been a member of the World Board for several years. He is an effective

businessman and generally considered to be one of the more fair members of the upper echelon of society. This translates to playing hard and squeezing any situation for the maximum benefit but stopping short of the blatant rapacity of some of his peers. This is one reason he was chosen for his present assignment. He is touring the outlying mines and ore processing plants to try to negotiate with unhappy workers there.

Streen's call includes two images. One is from a pickup inside the helmet of the vacc suit he is wearing and shows his face. The other is from a camera mounted on the shoulder of one of his assistants. It automatically tracks Streen so long as his assistant is facing him and shows him outside among obviously damaged ore-processing equipment. He has a couple of bodyguards with him, plus some administrative personnel. There are some other people nearby, wearing heavy-duty work vacc suits.

Streen quickly explains that he is looking at the damage caused by sabotage at the plant and will be unable to hold a conference call with the Travellers that evening. He wanted to send his personal apologies and to reschedule for a day or two in the future. As he is speaking the Travellers can see reflections of the group Streen had come to meet with in his faceplate. The image is distorted into a fish-eye panorama which makes it difficult to interpret what the Travellers are seeing. However, anyone who makes an Average (8+) Recon check has time to recognise movement as some of the workers draw guns.

If the Travellers do not see this or warn Streen, the first shots come as a surprise. Some are aimed at other workers, eliminating those who might interfere. The rest are aimed at Streen's party. One bodyguard is killed instantly when her faceplate is shattered, along with the assistant who was operating the camera. All the Travellers will see from that point on is from a sensor pointed at Streen's face – which will tell a story without conveying much useful information. If they call a warning, the bodyguards react a bit quicker. One is still fatally shot but manages to protect the camera operator.

The assailants do not want Streen dead. They plan to use him as a hostage and perhaps force him to reveal secrets or access codes held by his company. The plan was to eliminate his staff and bodyguards then seize him. Instead the workers have a fight on their hands. An 'assistant' pulls a compact laser weapon out of an attaché case and deploys its hidden armour. With this in one hand and the gun in the other she lays down suppressing fire and begins backing towards a nearby group of ATVs. The surviving bodyguard engages some workers rushing to cut off Streen's retreat. His real assistants flee with him.

The Travellers may witness this all unfold or perhaps view it later from security footage. Either way, the extraction is a professional one but it does not go perfectly. Under cover of her case-shield, the laser gunner holds off attempts to pursue from the front as one of the ATVs surges forward and opens its doors. One of the bodyguards is hit in the back, rupturing his air tanks. He manages to shove Streen inside before collapsing. The surviving members of the team scramble into the airlock or cling to the outside of the vehicle as Streen's driver accelerates away from the ambush.

'We need help,' Streen says just before all comms from the installation go out. This is one of those situations where it really is just a downed transmitter; the rebels have closed down the comms relay antenna, cutting Streen off from outside contact. The World Board may or may not be aware of the situation but in any case they have other matters to attend to.

OPEN REBELLION

The Travellers may become aware of noise out in the streets. The same situation is repeated in each of the building complexes of Rhylan; a feeble attempt is made at open rebellion. Gangs of workers, a few of them armed, are making an attempt to seize government centres and critical infrastructure. The expected outpouring of popular support will not appear, although there may be minor riots in some areas. The security forces at the world's de facto capital have been strengthened and respond with escalation. For the most part this means tear gas and batons but some of the offworld security people are decidedly trigger-happy.

Within minutes the newsfeeds are filled with images from 'all cities and settlements' showing a feeble rebellion being put down with ease. The message that 'security forces are bringing the situation under control' is repeated over and over again. Astute Travellers may notice that almost all the footage is from Rhylan, with minimal coverage of the other cities. Fringe information outlets do have some images from the other cities and the situation there is anything but controlled.

Some rioters try to gain entry to the hotel the Travellers are using. Their agenda might be to seize important people for use as hostages or maybe they just want to strike out at the injustice they feel but either way the Travellers may be in danger. Hotel security is used to

politely asking rich people not to make so much noise. They have not faced a serious threat in their entire careers and may well retreat in the face of one. On the other hand most of the rioters are just frustrated and angry, and may be unwilling to hurt people unless they are provoked. If so, the Travellers may have a chance to find a diplomatic solution.

The Travellers could fight the rioters. They are roaming the hotel in small groups for the most part, so the Travellers are unlikely to face more than five or six opponents. There are no dedicated rebels among these people; they are following the noisiest or the ones who cause the most entertaining destruction. The Travellers might be able to talk them down, perhaps persuading them to stop frightening the hotel staff who are as much victims as they are. They might even be able to befriend the rioters. The Travellers might end up sitting out the riot, swapping hilarious stories with the former rioters over the contents of their rooms' mini-bars.

Persuading any given group of rioters to leave the Travellers – or someone else – alone requires a bit of persuasion. Usually this will be accompanied by an Average (8+) Persuade check but Diplomat might also work. There are other options depending on the circumstances. The Referee should reward Travellers who play out the scene and come up with a decent argument with a positive DM. It might even be possible to calm down the situation in the hotel by persuading multiple groups. If the Travellers request assistance from the hotel, such as opening the bar for everyone, staff will probably comply without hesitation. Management might protest but they can be shown the benefits of bribery over rioters just taking what they want anyway. How an open bar in the middle of a riot plays out depends very much on the Travellers' handling of the situation.

The workers, for their part, are angry and will at least want a verbal confrontation even if they are willing to fight. They may cite all manner of injustices the Travellers know nothing about and are likely to consider offworlders to be in league with the company fat cats who oppress them. Still, they are for the most part just frustrated people caught up in the moment and can be distracted or persuaded if the Travellers try hard enough. Overall, the situation in Rhylan is troubled but there is no real prospect of the workers taking over. They will begin to slip away quite quickly, with the hardcore routed by inept but enthusiastic security personnel.

CITY RIOTERS

STR 8 **DEX** 6 **END** 8 **INT** 6 **EDU** 4 **SOC** 4
Athletics (various) 1, Melee 0

Weapons: Typically some blunt object (2D)
Equipment: Possibly tools

DINOM SECURITY PERSONNEL

About half of the city's security personnel are locals. They are treated slightly better than the average worker and generally loyal to the ruling elite. This is in part just professional habit; many of the security people are also disaffected by their loyalty to one another and their work ethic keeps them following orders… for now. Some elements of the security force might be persuaded to throw in their lot with the rebels.

The other half of the force consists of offworld contractors. Some are quite skilled and professional but there are far too many thugs and troublemakers among them. This part of the force has no sympathy for the local population and in many cases enjoy lording it over them. Heavy-handedness is their stock in trade. Both groups are equipped the same way, with a light torso protector and helmet, a baton and a handgun. In the present situation many have been issued carbine versions of standard assault rifles.

SECURITY PERSONNEL

STR 9 **DEX** 7 **END** 8 **INT** 7 **EDU** 5 **SOC** 6
Athletics (strength) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Melee (unarmed) 1, Recon 1

Weapons: Assault Carbine (3D-1), Baton (2D), Handgun (3D-3)
Armour: Body Protector and Helmet (+6)

ASSISTING STREEN

It is possible the World Board knows that Arlent Streen is in trouble. They are rather busy at present and lack the resources to react and in any case the comms blackout might have prevented his signal getting through. If this is the case then only the Travellers know where Streen is and how much danger he is in. They may not care, of course, in which case he will be left to his fate. However, the Travellers' mission will be furthered by making friends among the elite of Dinom and what better way to do that than saving the life of a World Board member?

Streen's last known location was between the city of Medianne and the mines north of it, about 1,600–1,700 kilometres from Rhylan. He was being pursued by revolutionaries last they saw and was headed generally north-west. There is no prospect of him getting back to the monorail line, so his only chance is to hazard a trek across the bright face of Dinom with wounded people aboard a possibly damaged ATV. His chances are not good.

1,800 kilometres is a long drive at the best of times but the bright face is a brutal environment which will make it even more dangerous. Streen's shortest and fastest route is a great circle, heading far north then swinging back south, but this means heading into the hottest and most dangerous terrain. Staying closer to the twilight zone might be safer were it not for the pursuers. There are also mountains to cross.

1,800 kilometres is not a long way for a starship. If the Travellers can negotiate the rioting and the failed revolution they could intercept Streen and rescue his personnel. Locating him should not be hard; his ATV comms system lacks the range to contact the Travellers without a local repeater, which is currently turned off. However, once within direct line of sight, a starship comms system should be able to find his signals and home in on them.

If the Travellers decide to help they will witness fighting in the streets and may have to negotiate with more rebels. Some are open to bribery, some can be persuaded or evaded, and some might decide to attack the Travellers. The same can be said for the security forces. The Referee can make as much or as little of the Travellers' difficulties as seems appropriate. Given how chaotic the situation is, a starfarer crew making for their ship will not concern the authorities very much – at least, not at first.

The Travellers will have little trouble getting to their ship once they reach the starport. Everyone's attention is on the rebellion and a starship making a rapid departure is no surprise. Absent any orders to intercept or impede the Travellers, port staff mostly ignore them. The port has not come under attack but it might, so staff are making rather panicky defensive preparations just in case.

The quickest way to locate Streen would be to take a ballistic path in the direction of his last known location and begin a sensor search once above the mountains. Locating the ATV takes just a few minutes but if the Travellers succeed in an Average (8+) Electronics (sensors) check they can gain some additional information. Streen's party are aboard a wheeled ATV, proceeding roughly north-west at what appears to be an oddly low speed. There are other vehicles some distance behind, apparently pursuers.

Contact with the ATV is relatively easy once the Travellers are in range. The position is not good. Streen's party are slogging across a particularly cratered area and have taken damage to one of their vehicle's wheels. They are aware they are being pursued but cannot be certain where the hostiles are. All vehicles involved in the pursuit are unarmed but if the pursuers catch up they will surely be able to cripple Streen's ATV and get inside.

There are various solutions to this problem. The Travellers could direct Streen to hide his vehicle in a crater or a dust pool and pick his crew up after the pursuers have passed, or they could attempt a direct rescue. This might have to be done under fire, which is not a much of a problem if the ATV can be driven straight into the ship. However, that would require landing in a very cratered area with such precision that the ATV can quickly board. It would be safer to hover just above the surface and have Streen's people leave their vehicle to be pulled up into the ship.

LANDING

Selecting a suitable landing spot and directing the ATV to head for it requires an Average (8+) Electronics (sensors) check. Setting the ship down in such rough terrain without damaging it requires a Formidable (14+) Pilot check. Failure does not indicate a crash unless there are extreme circumstances such as a double 1 on the dice which is also a failure with Effect -6 or worse. Otherwise, the pilot will slightly prang the ship, doing 2 points of damage for every point of negative Effect.

If the Travellers manage this, the ATV can board directly through the cargo doors providing there is enough space available. The ATV requires a minimum of 10 tons of cargo space to enter, which may require some moving of items in the cargo bay or could be completely impossible.

HOVERING

Hovering is easier, requiring only an Average (8+) Pilot check to remain suitably steady. However, Streen and his people will have to dismount from their vehicle and assist their wounded to the ship. Travellers will then have to pull them up. This is not all that difficult but it will take time and during this the first of the pursuers enter the crater. They are proceeding rather recklessly, bouncing about and completely leaving the ground at times. None of the pursuing ATVs has a mounted weapon but vacc-suited rebels will open fire with weapons similar to the assault carbines that arm the world's security forces.

REBELS

STR 8 **DEX** 6 **END** 8 **INT** 6 **EDU** 4 **SOC** 3
Gun Combat 0, Recon 0

Weapons: Assault Carbine (3D-1)
Armour: Reinforced Vacc Suit (+5)
Equipment: Tools and prospecting instruments

The rebels may drop personnel off to shoot from a couple of hundred metres away, whilst others stand up in their ATV's roof hatch or cling to an external panel. Shooting under these conditions is extremely difficult, with DM-8 imposed for a fast-moving ATV in rough terrain and DM-4 if the rebels slow down to a sensible speed. The Travellers are unlikely to be hit unless they are very unlucky but there is still a real threat.

In addition to Streen, there are four people in the ATV: his driver, the laser-armed bodyguard and two assistants. One of them is wounded badly enough to need carrying to the ship and manhandling up into the cargo bay. Getting each able-bodied person aboard takes 3D+6 seconds. The casualty takes three times as long. To simulate the rather wild fire coming in, every round there is a chance of something coming close enough to matter. 8+ on a straight 2D check indicates D3 attacks come close enough to be rolled for. The rebels will still need to roll to successfully hit, of course. Who is targeted is determined randomly.

The rebels are determined to capture Streen if they can but they are not fanatics. Indeed, their morale in the face of return fire is distinctly weak. They press their initial attack in an amateurish and reckless manner, mostly because they had already committed to it before the starship arrived but once they take two or three casualties they will waver and may break off in a panicky manner.

ENGAGING THE ATVS

If the Travellers want to they could easily eliminate any or all of the pursuing ATVs. The RVSC personnel aboard are uncomfortable with the idea, although AutoGunner is positively enthusiastic. If the Travellers took the missile option for their ship, they will find that the ATVs are far too close to engage directly. They could come up with a clever solution to this, such as launching missiles upward in a very high arc to give them time to arm, then driving down again. A couple

of hundred metres is a rather small margin however, though AutoGunner is happy to give it a try. A missile engagement of this sort requires a Difficult (10+) Gunner (turret) check to set up, and the missiles will not auto-track such a small target. Effect of-6 or worse will result in the Travellers' ship or Streen's ATV – or both – being in the blast radius.

A safer option is to use the ship's lasers. They are not designed to be targeted on something as small as an ATV and will suffer DM-2 on Gunner checks. Warning shots might not work as there is no atmosphere for the lasers to ionise. This means that beams and pulses are invisible and the rebels may not at first realise the explosions of vapourised rock they are seeing are connected with weapons fire. Even amateurs like they are will get the message sooner or later but in the meantime the rebels will continue to shoot and close in.

Hits on an ATV with a starship laser are devastating. The ATVs used by the rebels are a standard design, with Protection +6 and Hull 60. Hits with starship-grade weapons multiply damage by 10. Thus the ship's dual pulse laser mounts do 2D+1 damage plus Effect, all multiplied by 10. On average, this is around 80–100 damage. Even after taking armour into account, this is more than enough to wreck and ATV and vaporise everyone inside. Doing so will produce an instant and precipitate defeat.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Streen is a member of the World Board and wants to know what is going on planetwide. If the Travellers let him use their ship's communications system they will be party to whatever he learns. Once communication is established it quickly becomes apparent that all is not well. Rhylan seems to be firmly in the hands of the World Board but Napan has apparently fallen. There is fighting in the streets in Medianne but so far the security forces seem to be holding onto critical areas.

Broadcasts coming out of Napan certainly suggest the rebels are in control. They have seized at least some of the city's critical infrastructure and are broadcasting from the main governmental centre. Members of the elite and at least one member of the World Board have been captured and are triumphantly displayed. Some are injured, although there is no sign of deliberate mistreatment.

The rebels have been broadcasting a series of rather confused messages since they launched their attempted coup. The main narrative seems remarkably modest; all major industry on Dinom will become the property of the new Workers Council, which declares its loyalty to the Imperium. Shares in the main industries will be distributed among the workers, with the elite permitted to keep enough to live comfortably providing they leave Dinom and never return. The Workers' Council guarantees safe passage to anyone who surrenders.

These messages are interspersed with rather rabid and bloodthirsty exhortations to smash the elitists and shoot the World Board out of hand, creating a great deal of uncertainty and not really aiding the workers' cause. All of these messages are being fed onto the world datanet and it may be possible to track their origins. A Traveller willing to spend an hour and attempt a Difficult (10+) Electronics (computers) check can obtain one of the following pieces of information on every success:

- The moderate messages are coming from two sources. One is in the Cold Face mines south of Napan, presumably the administrative centre for the mines. It is reasonable to assume this is the centre for the revolution and its headquarters. Some broadcasts are coming from Napan itself.
- The more rabid messages are being inserted into the data stream from an unknown location or locations, which apparently bounces around servers in multiple settlements.
- Someone with a more sophisticated knowledge of datanet manipulation is making these broadcasts, despite their rather simplistic content. That might raise some questions if the Travellers think about it.

Arlent Streen feels that, under the circumstances, he can speak for the World Board. He thanks the Travellers for their assistance but wants to ask for more. Their intervention could turn the tide of the rebellion, he feels. This, of course, assumes he is alive. If the Travellers did not come to his assistance he will be someday found, faceplate shattered by a pistol bullet, somewhere out on the bright face. In this case, another member of the World Board will ask for the Travellers' assistance.

The Travellers receive signals from the rebels as well. There are two variants, both coming from the main rebel headquarters. The first simply states that the situation has nothing to do with the Travellers and they are requested to leave peacefully or remain at the starport where their safety is guaranteed. The second asks the Travellers to hand over Streen and anyone with him, and to join the rebellion. The Travellers are offered high status in the new world government if they contribute to victory. They will be leaders of the world's

interstellar commerce fleet – not difficult since theirs is the only ship the rebels would have – and will have a say in governing an entire planet.

The rebels may or may not intend to keep the second promise but they are realistic enough to know that they do not need more enemies. The rebels will allow the Travellers to depart even if they take Streen or other members of the World Board with them. If the Travellers have acted against the rebels and caused casualties there will be some who want revenge but the rebel leaders know it is in their interests to simply let the Travellers leave.

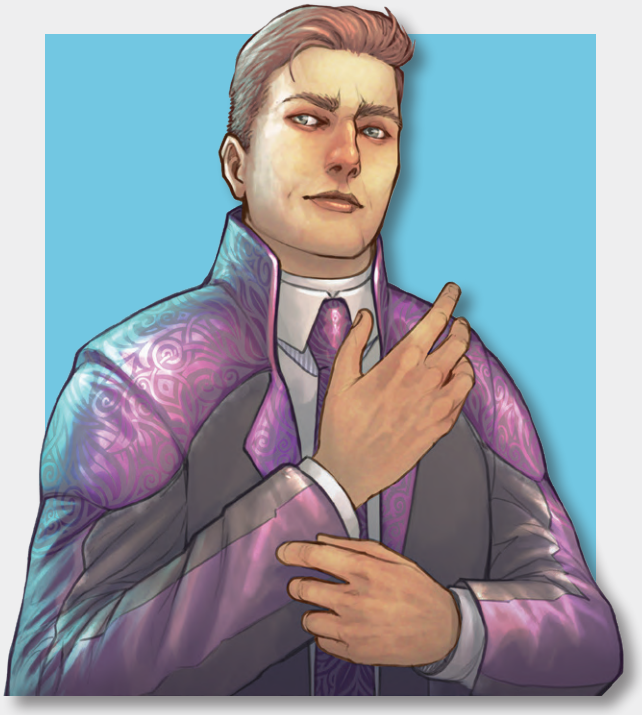
CHIEF EXECUTIVE ARLENT STREEN

Arlent Streen is a member of the World Board on Dinom and a major shareholder in several of the world's industries. His holdings include mines and ore processing equipment but also some industry and infrastructure maintenance companies. He is not the owner of these firms but is a major shareholder with a great deal of influence. The majority of his holdings are in and around Medianne.

Streen is little more popular with the workers than other World Board members but is not hated as some are. His policies are one-sided, geared towards making money for the shareholders above all else but he is aware that the workers will tolerate only so much. He is also adept at influencing company operators to follow his agenda in a way that allows him to distance himself from the ill-treatment of workers. There are some members of the working class who actually think he is more favourable towards them than the company owners they work for.

Like many of the upper echelon of Dinom society, Streen is not a bad man, in that he is not deliberately cruel to anyone and means nobody harm other than his business competitors. He cares little for ordinary people, however, and will act towards the Travellers according to his estimation of them. Those who seem like important corporate figures he will treat as peers, whilst those who are 'just workers' receive little more than basic courtesy. This is tempered by a more human side; Streen has had a good scare and those who helped him will not be forgotten.

Streen is an opportunist and as his initial terror fades he begins to see threats and opportunities. He wants to make sure the facilities he has shares in are protected but does not mind too much if those of his competitors are taken by the rebels or handed over in negotiations. He soon begins planning to gain the most he can out of the situation. If he can create the impression of being the saviour of Medianne, that will raise his status. He might even become sole planetary governor if he orchestrates the crushing of the rebellion. If, on the other hand, negotiations are necessary he wants to lead them. Handled well enough, that could have the same result – Streen comes out on top – although with a shifting of power to give the Workers Council more say in governance. He will thus attempt to thread a careful path through the situation, trying to at once be a potential friend to the rebels and their nemesis.



CHIEF EXECUTIVE ARLENT STREEN

STR 4 **DEX** 6 **END** 8 **INT** 9 **EDU** 10 **SOC** 9
Admin 2, Broker 2, Carouse 3, Persuade 4

Weapons: Bodyguards carry weapons. Executives do not.
Armour: Vacc Suit (+10)
Equipment: He has people for that.

ESCAPE FROM NAPAN

Whether it comes from Streen or some other member of the World Board, the Travellers receive a request for assistance. It appears that Napan is more or less in the hands of the Workers Council, although there is some fighting still ongoing. They have captured numerous

members of the planetary elite, whose fate is at present unknown. Others have attempted an escape from the city by way of the monorail system. Of these, the earliest to flee made it to Medianne and have begun proceeding to Rhylan where they will set up an interim crisis council. However, rebel forces have disabled the monorail in that direction. A trainload of managers, shareholders and executives, and their families, have been forced to leave the city eastward towards the unfinished section of the monorail.

There is no way to reach the stranded people before the rebels do, other than the Travellers' starship. Streen (or his replacement) therefore requests they proceed immediately to the unfinished monorail section and attempt a rescue. There should be a dozen or so people there, most of them families and dependents. If they can be extracted before the rebels close in the position of the World Board will be stronger. Streen reminds the Travellers that at least some of the rebels are openly calling for the execution of captured enemies.

COMPLICATIONS

If the Travellers agree, the end of the monorail is not hard to find; just fly east and follow the tracks or pick them up after crossing the mountains west of Rhylan. There is, however, a complication. As the Travellers are proceeding towards the unfinished monorail system their threat warning system indicates they are being tracked by aerospace defence systems of an unknown type. Streen, if he is present, looks as puzzled as anyone else but answers oddly if confronted about it.

'They're not active yet,' says Streen about the aerospace defence systems. Clearly they are; missile plumes are detected rising from a mountainous area south of Napan. The missiles are curving towards the Travellers' ship but are not on an intercept vector. AutoGunner, or a Traveller experienced in gunnery, can predict the missiles' trajectory; they are trying to hit the Travellers' ship but cannot change vector quickly enough. The reason for this is that their powerful initial boost is designed to get the missiles to orbital height quickly. They simply have too much initial velocity to engage a lower target unless the Travellers are more or less directly overhead.

As the Travellers realise there is a cone in which the missiles can engage them and thus all they have to do is stay out of it, a second launch is detected. This is moving much more slowly. The rebels have disabled the initial high-boost phase. The missiles are curving towards the Travellers' ship and simulations predict an engagement this time. There are three missiles in this salvo, each following an independent trajectory. They will attack separately using different techniques, as if the gunners are experimenting. One takes a high-powered least-time course as soon as it is high enough; another is lobbed much higher and accelerates downward. The first engagement will occur in 2D minutes, the others 1D and 3D minutes after that.

Streen says that the World Board did spend some money on planetary defence a few years back. Bunkers were dug close to each city, to be equipped with a vertical-launch PAD (Planetary Aerospace Defence) missile system. The project was never finished however; complications with weapon procurement and construction delayed installation of the weapons. Only the bunker at Rhylan is operational, with a handful of missiles available. It is still in the hands of the World Board.

Someone must have smuggled missiles on-planet and set them up somewhere before the revolution. That suggests a level of preparation that might be beyond a rabble of disaffected workers and the sort of connections required to orchestrate arming the rebels with anti-ship missiles. In the interim the Travellers need to deal with the immediate threat.

The Referee should determine the time to impact as soon as the missiles are detected and keep track of each starship combat round that passes. Travellers can take normal actions in this time. If a partial round remains before a particular missile impacts, Travellers can take actions but suffer DM-1 for every minute less than the full six that remains, so if a missile was nine minutes out the Travellers could take one action against it as normal and another with DM-3 as only three of the normal six minutes are available.

Firing on the missiles using the ship's lasers is treated as normal point defence, although any hit will destroy a single missile. If the Travellers choose to evade they can extend the time for a given missile to reach detonation range by the amount of Thrust applied that round but this is not without hazards. The missiles are all following different trajectories so Thrust must be applied separately between them if the pilot wants to increase impact time for more than one. An Average (8+) Pilot check must be made with a negative DM equal to the maximum Thrust being applied against any one missile to avoid getting too close to the ground. If this is failed the pilot must immediately pass a Difficult (10+) Pilot check with no DM for thrust to avoid clipping an obstruction close to the ground. This will do 1D damage to the ship per point of negative Effect.

The Travellers may discover that by diving very low and using the monorail tubes as sensor cover they can evade detection and targeting. If they do not do this they will be attacked by salvoes of two to four missiles every D3 rounds. From the low rate of fire the Travellers may infer that the weapons are being manually loaded onto improvised launchers.

THE MONORAIL RESCUE

The monorail system runs in two parallel tubes, linked in places by personnel accessways and occasionally by wider areas where a train can be switched to the other line. Normally there is an 'eastward' and a 'westward' line but the possibility of damage or a stuck train makes it necessary to swap lines from time-to-time.

The tunnels are unpressurised but do have retractable doors every few kilometres in case compartmentalisation is necessary. Trains, consisting of a power car and one or more passenger or freight cars, hang from an overhead single rail. This is unpowered; all trains use fuel cells which are swapped at the rail depot at Rhylan. Cars are pressurised and linked by a flexible corridor. The whole system is simple and robust, and capable of running huge trainloads of ore back to the starport.

The rebels tried to halt the progress of the escaping train by closing the internal doors but automated systems opened them again as it passed. A second train was seized to carry a pursuit party and now it is just 20 minutes or so from the end of the line. The escapees have reached that point and have nowhere left to go. They are inside a pressurised two-car train, with few weapons and a handful of vacc suits between them.

The pursuers are aboard a cargo train. Even empty, it masses much more than the passenger vehicle. A collision at speed would send the wreckage of both out of the end of the tunnel, probably killing everyone aboard. A slower nudge would push the smaller train off the end of the rail, causing it to crash down to the ground outside. In the low gravity of Dinom this might be survivable but injuries are certain.

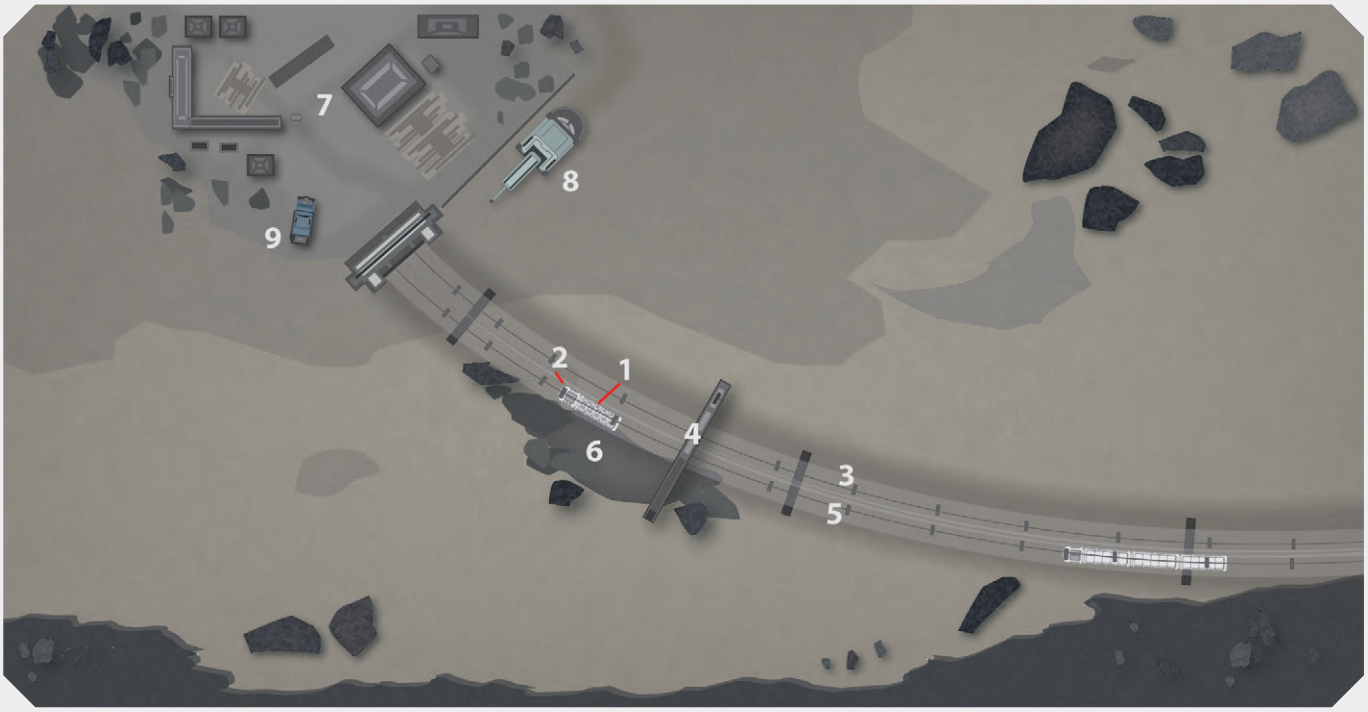
The pursuers are rebels with a job to do, not hardcore killers… for the most part. The majority will try to capture their enemies and will fight to suppress resistance. The pursuers hope their victims will simply surrender, in which case they can be taken back aboard the passenger train and used as hostages. If that does not work they will dismount from the train and force the escapees to surrender at gunpoint. Resistance will have to be squashed and that means firing at a pressurised passenger car containing children.

However, there is a minority among the pursuers with a different agenda. They are Ine Givar members, dedicated to the overthrow of the Imperium, and they have a mission to make the conflict on Dinom as bloody as possible. This group are not aware of the bigger picture – they are just foot soldiers – but they are confident in their leaders and dedicated to the cause. They will fight longer and harder than the workers, although they are not in any way a suicide squad. They will stop short of deliberately shooting at children but are entirely willing to smash their train into the halted one no matter who is aboard.

The Ine Givar contingent has a far more aggressive plan. They intend to approach quickly as if they are planning to stop at the last second and board the passenger train. In fact they are going to jam the controls and detach the rearmost cargo car of their train. As it stops using its emergency brakes, all the freight cars will continue and smash the lighter passenger train into tiny bits. Rebels will be killed in the crash and survivors can then be eliminated. By creating martyrs on both sides they will ensure escalation of the conflict.

The Travellers will need to rescue a group of frightened civilians, including multiple children, from a halted monorail train in an unpressurised tunnel. This requires persuading people to don emergency suits or get into rescue balls and leave the train, which may not be easy to do. Most of these people have led very privileged lives. Some are of a 'save me or I'll sue you' mentality, which is as solidly entrenched as it is stupid. They genuinely believe it is the duty of others to get them out of this predicament in comfort. There will be indignant refusals to don suits or climb into anything, coupled with declarations that 'there are children here!' as if that will make the Travellers suddenly become more able to help.

The Travellers should roleplay their interactions with the escapees rather than just making a skill check. Pointing out that there is a huge freight train barrelling straight at them and it cannot be relied upon to stop would get through to most people but there is no guarantee here. Against a backdrop of screaming children and entitled parents' demands they will have to persuade the escapees to leave the safety of the passenger train. Doing so from a distance would be Very Difficult (12+) at best but if the Travellers come to the train in person it will become much easier to talk people into doing what must be done. The best approach would be a firm but



patient insistence in person, accompanied by assistance in donning emergency suits or getting kids into rescue balls. The latter can be rolled by another person or the user can walk inside and cause them to roll but they are prone to snagging and could rip on a projection.

The rescue should be roleplayed out using as many of the following incidents as seems desirable. The Travellers could buy some time by manually commanding the internal compartmentalisation doors to close further down the track. This will force the pursuers to slow down until they can get an override from the rail depot at Napan. As they begin accelerating again, the monitors at the link gantry and aboard the passenger train will predict an increasingly destructive collision if the freight train does not slow down.

The end of the monorail is a construction site and currently abandoned. The two tubes run aboveground, on supports sunk into the bedrock, linked by a supporting frame but each is capable of standing alone. The lowest point of each tube is four metres above the ground at this point; height varies with terrain contours over the length of the line, at times passing through ridges or running high above crater floors.

1. **Passenger Car:** This car contains 14 people, about half of them children, who are families and dependents of executives. In some cases they have been separated from other family members or from executives who have sent them away for safety whilst they try to stabilise the situation. The passenger car has several emergency softsuits and rescue balls, and can be exited through its rear hatch or by way of the power car.

2. **Power Car:** The power and drive systems are fully enclosed, with a simple manual control system for occasions when the monorail is not being controlled by its centralised operating system. The escapees used manual control to override the rebels' attempt to recall the train. There are additional rescue balls and softsuits in this car.

The train does not have an airlock. The hatches at each end of the linking corridors can act as an airlock between two linked cars, or one car can be used as an airlock with personnel clambering down onto the track in softsuits. This is the recommended emergency escape method. Notices about it are posted in all cars, though it has never been necessary since work on the monorail was begun.

3. **Eastbound Tube:** The tubes are wide enough to accommodate large ore carriers or the much smaller passenger cars. Internal diameter of the tube is some eight metres.

4. **Link Gantry:** The gantry's personnel platforms at each end can be accessed directly from an ore car or by way of an extending platform. Normally this

is automatically activated when a car is stopped alongside it. Getting up to the platform from the tube floor is possible by way of handholds set into the walls. Personnel in the tunnel would not normally be endangered by a passenger train but would have to crouch in the centre to avoid being crushed by an ore train. The gantry is not enclosed between the tunnels. There are manual control points for internal doors on the gantry platforms.

5. **Westbound Tube:** This is more or less identical to the eastbound equivalent. The outer walls of the tube are constructed from a material made by liquifying local rock and resetting it as a form of moulded concrete. It is known universally as concret, from CONstruction acCRETion, and is much stronger than the material known as concrete in lower-technology societies.

6. **Temporary Ramp:** A ramp of compacted rubble faced with a thin layer of concret gives easy access to the westbound tunnel. A vehicle could be driven up into the tunnel and placed under the link gantry's end point.

7. **Levelled Surface:** The surface of Dinom has been roughly levelled off for a kilometre or more ahead of the tube endings and a plinth is under construction for the next support about 200 metres ahead. Beyond that the projected route of the monorail can be traced but no work has begun. There are vehicles, mostly open earthmoving and construction types, scattered here and there. The workforce have fled or gone to join the revolution in whatever transportation vehicles may have been present.

8. **Mobile Crane:** The crane not only lifts sections of rail or construction material into place, it also has a nozzle for spraying liquid concret over a framework. The usual practice is to create a frame and line it with a thin polymer membrane then spray concret over it, repeating the process to build up a strong and airtight structure in multiple layers.

9. **Bulldozer:** The bulldozer has a pressurised cab which could squeeze a couple of additional people in. It is tall enough to be used as a platform to get up to or down from a halted train.

INCIDENTS

The following vignettes are characteristic of the situation. They may be repeated more than once, with some variation.

AN ENTITLED PARENT: One of the train passengers is particularly self-important, not to mention scared out of their wits. They try to take control of the situation by fixing what they can – or attempting to do so – whilst ignoring the bigger picture. This individual pesters the Travellers with demands they find a better fitting softsuit, or a proper vacc suit, and keeps wanting to know how the Travellers propose to get their children to safety. This behaviour might even extend to demanding a Traveller give their vacc suit to the parent, or trying to drag someone else's child out of a recue ball because their own kids deserve the best ones. The Travellers might try diplomacy or just manhandle the entitled idiot, or something else entirely. Even a flawless rescue will not make this person grateful. They will pick faults and threaten legal action over the tiniest imagined error or lack of respect.

SCARED CHILDREN: Not surprisingly, scared children can be difficult. They will not want to get into rescue balls and may behave in an irrational manner. One may refuse to be rescued and have to be forced into a rescue ball; another may hide. Some of these kids are the offspring of entitled parents like the one above. Others are just terrified and reacting to what is in front of them rather than dealing with the wider situation. A Traveller might end up trying to figure out how to stuff a violently struggling six-year-old into a rescue ball whilst the screaming kid pounds on their faceplate with tiny but determined fists.

SUITING UP: A lot of people on Dinom never go outside their pressurised building complexes and did not really pay attention during the mandatory safety briefings. Now they need to get into a suit whilst in a state of mortal terror and they are really struggling. The Travellers will have to deal with several people all failing to get suited up at once. If they are not rigorous in checking suits someone might leave a connection loose, which will become apparent once there is no pressure outside. The Travellers may have to restrain a panicking individual and hold them down whilst someone else fixes their suit.

COAXING SOMEONE OUT: Even when everyone is suited or in rescue balls, there will be difficulties. Getting frightened people out of the – admittedly illusory – safety of the train will prove difficult. There will be some who balk at this point, or who start to panic. Coaxing is one solution, although just grabbing someone and shoving may be more effective in the short term. Rescue balls will bang together and bounce off one another, sending the occupants rolling helplessly away.

ONTO THE GANTRY: If the Travellers think of it, they can reverse the train a little and step straight onto the gantry leading to the link tunnel after it extends to meet the train's door. If they instead descend to ground level they will have to climb the handholds in the wall. This is doable for someone in a softsuit, although there is a risk of snagging, but rescue balls must be lifted. Dinom has low gravity, so it is possible to lift a rescue ball – especially if it contains someone small and light such as a child – up part of the way. Rolling the ball up the curved wall is also an option, as is snagging the rescue cord on the ball and lifting from above. It might even be possible to hurl a rescue ball up, although this would be disconcerting at best for the occupant. The Referee should also take into account the possibility of a child in the rescue ball violently struggling as Travellers try to balance it for lifting.

Out the Front Door: Rather than using the gantry, the Travellers might go out the nearby end of the tube. This is well above ground level, however. Jumping is an option, given the low gravity, but the landing area is uneven and strewn with construction debris. A Difficult (10+) Vacc Suit check is required to avoid injury, with the unfortunate subject suffering 1D damage for every point of negative Effect. Damage to ankles is the most likely result but a fall results on Effect -2 or worse. This could cause harm anywhere and may rip a softsuit. Rescue balls dropped from the tube may bounce alarmingly and could also rip. Providing they do not, the occupant will not be hurt from the fall, although they may be terrified, disorientated and possibly covered in vomit.

In the event of a fall or bouncing rescue ball, a Vacc Suit check, or a straight 2D check in the case of a rescue ball, determines whether or not a tear occurs. On Effect -1 to -5 the tear is small, causing 1D damage per round until sealed. On Effect -6 or worse the tear is serious, causing 2D damage. Sadistic Referees might like to consider the possibility that a deflating rescue ball might propel itself around erratically. The chance to avoid a rip is as follows.

Worker-type reinforced vacc suit	4+
Standard starship-type vacc suit	6+
Rescue ball	8+
Softsuit	10+

The Travellers might find other ways down from the tube entrance. It would be much easier to climb onto the crane job or the cab of the bulldozer if they can be repositioned. Both are in workable condition and can be driven by anyone who enters the cab. Drive (track) checks are necessary for anything but the simplest manoeuvres undertaken with great care.

COLLISION IMMINENT

It will become apparent at some point that the freight train is travelling at a recklessly high speed and will collide with the passenger cars still at the end of the tube. If the Travellers contact the rebels on the train and ask them to stop, they will trigger what was going to happen anyway. The rebels state they have no intention of harming anyone who does not resist. They intend to take the occupants of the passenger train prisoner and return up the line to Napan with them. Offworlders are requested not to interfere and will be left alone if they do so.

Anyone monitoring the channel hears a confused conversation in the background. Someone announces the controls are not responding, then an argument breaks out. It quickly escalates into several voices shouting for others to drop their weapons, then a shot is heard. It is followed by others and whoever the Travellers were speaking to shouts, 'Get them out of the way! It's not going to stop!'. More shots follow, then the channel is cut. Moments later the monitors detect the freight train's last car uncouple itself and apply its emergency brakes. The rest of the train continues to accelerate.

If the Travellers were not in contact with the rebels this happens 'off camera' but they may find out about it later from someone else. The pursuit force included a handful of Ine Givar members who want to cause a collision that kills members of both sides. The more hate they can stir up, the greater the benefit to their cause. They have eliminated the ordinary rebels and retired to the last car which is braking to a stop. The rest of the train will continue to accelerate until it runs out of line. After the collision, the Ine Givar operatives intend to walk the rest of the way to check on their victims then wait for a new power car to be run up the line to collect them.

How this plays out depends on the Travellers. If they come up with a clever solution, such as somehow derailing the freight train, the Referee should let them try it. Sending the passenger train back up the line requires over-riding its safety system which is designed to prevent a collision but it can be done. The freight train will not stop; its controls are smashed. A collision will not stop the much heavier mass going the other way, though pushing the twisted wreck ahead of it will slow the freight train and could perhaps distort the monorail enough to bring it eventually to a stop. It will certainly buy some time.

More than likely the Travellers' efforts will be directed towards getting everyone out of the way. The exact timing of the train's arrival is a little fluid, to allow for dramatic pace-setting. The Travellers might go down to

the wire, hurling rescue balls up to the gantry then diving flat as the freight train screams by just above them. They may tumble out of the tube mouth and scatter as the freight train hurtles off the end of the line. If they are well organised they may have the satisfaction of watching the train wreck well after they have rescued everyone.

If the freight train still has any significant momentum when it exits the tube it will travel a surprisingly long way before impacting the ground, due to Dinom's low gravity. The destruction will be significant, making it difficult to search through the wreckage for evidence or clues about what happened. The Ine Givar operatives in the tube will retreat if they think they will face opposition. The Travellers could pursue but it may be more important to get the survivors to safety. In any case the missile launchers near Napan will begin lobbing missiles high and sending them down into the general area of the tube end in the hope one will lock onto the Travellers' ship. It might be best to depart the area before one gets lucky.

THE BATTLE OF MEDIANNE

Whatever the outcome of the monorail rescue, the fight for control over Dinom is moving towards a climax. Rhylan is firmly in the hands of the World Board, whilst Napan is about 80% controlled by the rebels and will soon be completely under their dominance. Medianne is mostly controlled by the World Board, although some building complexes are contested and a few are in rebel hands. Extreme measures such as venting enemy held complexes to space are not available to either side as there are civilians inside. The Ine Givar operatives within the rebel force would be willing to do it, however.

At first glance it appears that the World Board is winning the fight. However, there is a problem. A large force of rebels is moving overland towards Medianne. They are using every form of transport they could gather, with combat personnel carried aboard converted ore sleds dragged by ATVs. This force might be enough to turn the tide of the battle, especially as it has the ability to force entry into the city at any point. This is provided by a number of mining lasers which have been crudely mounted onto construction vehicles. The latter are slow-moving under their own power but are being dragged on sleds. If they can deploy close to the city they will be able to burn an entry point with sufficient precision to keep collateral casualties to an acceptable level.

The defenders really have no counter to this threat. Medianne is not a fortified city and there are no armed forces on Dinom – just a rather poor security service. If the lasers are brought close to the city the rebels will be able to storm whatever buildings they like or threaten to cause mass casualties if they are so inclined. The only possibility is to keep the lasers away from the city, which means either creating a defensive line in front of the city or launching a mobile counterattack.

What troops can be spared from the fighting in the city are loaded aboard ATVs and other vehicles, heading out towards the incoming rebel army. There is little uniformity or discipline among the counterattackers, just a general rush forward. Their goal is the Anakka Ridge, a few kilometres outside the city. Bounded at one end by the Irkhar Crater and at the other by a region of broken ground, it is the only defensive position of any worth within reach. Detachments peel off towards the crater and the broken area to cover the flanks whilst the main force makes for the ridge line. It is soon apparent they are not going to get there in time.

The lead elements of the rebel force crest the ridge and begin descending as the first defenders get into range. Nobody has any idea what they are doing here, so the ensuing fight becomes a scramble, with ATVs ramming one another and intense small arms fire battering at their hulls. Some personnel are dropped to fight on foot whilst others fire wildly from moving vehicles. The lead elements of the rebel force are outnumbered and if anything slightly more inept than the defenders but they have an advantage.

Few among the rebels know they have offworld benefactors and fewer still suspect it is the Ine Givar. Support has not been immense but did include quantities of rocket-propelled grenade launchers and shoulder-fired guided missiles. Some of the rebels have been trained with these and let fly with more enthusiasm than skill. Most of the hits scored are lucky but within the force are a few Ine Givar operatives who are more capable in using the weapons. It would take a careful observation of the situation to notice this but Travellers who possess Tactics (military) may realise that a small percentage of the rebel force are accounting for a lot of the defenders' vehicles.

If the Travellers do not intervene in a meaningful fashion, or if they assist the rebels in any effective manner, Medianne will fall to the Workers' Council. If they choose to help defend Medianne they may determine the outcome of the battle and the fate of an entire world. Arlent Streen or another member of the World Board will certainly request their assistance. If the Travellers want to make demands they can negotiate for their help but that does not mean a deal made under duress will necessarily be honoured.

1. **Outskirts of Medianne:** The city is composed of multiple complexes of sealed buildings linked by personnel and vehicle tunnels.

2. **Irkhar Crater:** The crater is deep, with treacherous pools of deep dust and regions of unstable surface. It might be passable in a vehicle but only with great care at an extremely low speed.

3. **Anakka Ridge:** This section is very steep and faced with loose rock.

4. **Collapsed Section:** Personnel could climb the rubble with care but vehicles are likely to get stuck or slide back down.

5. **Anakka Ridge:** This section is lower and smoother, allowing an easy passage for vehicles.

6. **Broken Ground:** Tumbled boulders provide cover for infantry and block the passage of vehicles.

7. **Extraction Plant:** A small ore extraction plant exploits a rich vein close to the surface. A deep crevasse to the south also has exposed veins, which are mined using machinery lowered on gantries. Spoil is deposited in the bottom.

COURSE OF THE BATTLE

The battle for Medianne begins as the first rebel vehicles crest the Anakka Ridge. A fierce but rather inept firefight breaks out, with vehicles ramming one another at times. On other occasions infantry manage to get aboard a vehicle and begin attacking its hatches or vision panels. This phase of the battle is total chaos, in which the defenders come off worst.

What follows is characterised by a running fight back towards the city. Some of the defenders take up positions atop the extraction plant, on its conveyors or atop its towers. This creates an obstacle for the attackers and allows some of the defenders' vehicles to rally and make a semi-organised counterattack. The extraction plant becomes a primary target for heavy weapons – the few there are – and ground assault.

If the Travellers do nothing to prevent it, the defenders lose their hold on the excavation plant and are pushed back until their defence suddenly turns into a rout. Some make it back to the city but soon there are mining lasers burning holes in building complexed. Each is evacuated in turn and the defenders try to repel the assault but as more and more complexes are breached the defenders are spread too thin and the civilian population is packed into too small an area. A few trains escape down the monorail to Rhylan before

the lines are cut by the rebels. Ultimately, Medianne is forced to surrender. With two of its three cities under rebel control, the fate of Dinom appears to be sealed.

THE TRAVELLERS AT MEDIANNE

The Travellers could join either side, do nothing, or act as a rescue service for the wounded – whatever they think is best. If they offer to remain neutral and rescue casualties, both sides will agree to give them safe passage. That does not prevent the odd stray shot of course, and perhaps an 'unfortunately' aimed rocket, but overall the Travellers' neutrality will be respected so long as they operate without favour. Rescue operations will not affect the outcome of the battle.

The defenders do not have much weaponry that can harm the Traveller's ship. If they join the rebels, they are essentially flying an impenetrable fortress and can do as they please. The ship will get dinged and bashed, and the RVSC personnel aboard will wince at every tiny impact but the Travellers have free rein to intervene at their leisure.

If the Travellers join the defenders, or the rebels think they have, things are different. The rebels have plenty of unguided rocket-propelled grenades and a starship is a big target. Even with damage reduced to one-tenth, the ship will suffer at least cosmetic effects if hit and it will be a priority target. Most of the 60mm grenades launched by the rebels will miss, eventually coming down… somewhere. They do have guided missiles as well, and these will hit a lot more often. The ship's lasers cannot target something so small. In short, if the Travellers take their ship into the battle zone it will receive a constant nibbling, with the possibility of a lucky hit taking out antennae or other vulnerable systems and impeding ship operations.

During the various phases of the battle the Travellers can influence the outcome and the aftermath in various ways. The Referee needs to keep track of a DM which will be used later. This is named Victory and begins with a value of +0. Victory is used to determine the final outcome of the battle but is irrelevant if the Travellers stay neutral or join the rebels; in that case events will unfold as already described. If Victory reaches -10, the defenders will surrender even if the battle seems to still be in doubt.

BATTLE PHASE 1: THE INITIAL CLASH

During this phase of the fight it is not clear who is winning, nor which side any given vehicle is on. If they look hard enough the Travellers will be able to discern identification marks – a pair of stripes in vivid colours – on the side of rebel vehicles. These are difficult to make out at the best of times, with dust thrown up and vehicles making wild manoeuvres, and cannot be seen from beyond ground-launched missile range. Optical sensors could do so easily if they could be kept focused on a target for long enough but that is unlikely under the circumstances. If the Travellers want to use their lasers or missiles from outside response range they will probably have to accept they will hit as many defenders as attackers.

To identify a target at small arms range a Traveller must pass an Average (8+) Recon check, otherwise there is a 50–50 chance a given vehicle or group of personnel belongs to either side. The fact they are firing at the Travellers is a useful guide, although if their actions have been ambiguous thus far there is a chance that friendly fire might beget more friendly fire.

Similar comments apply for much of the battle, with vehicles intermixed during most stages. However, there will be some clear targets. A group of personnel launching rockets at the extraction plant are certain to be rebels, for example. The rear echelons of the rebel force are also easy to identify. The Travellers could take out the mining lasers with a few laser shots or missiles, if they identify the threat. That is by no means likely, as the Travellers would have to realise what the objects on some of the vehicles are and figure out they could be used to breach the city. If the Travellers do spot the problem and pre-empt it, so be it, but the Referee should not suggest this course of action as it shortcuts past some of the drama unfolding in front of the Travellers.

During this phase of the battle the Travellers might join in at ground level, try to give support from their ship, or almost anything else. If they are taking fire the Referee should remind them they have the people they just rescued aboard. One reasonable option is acting as an observation and command post. Neither side will just start taking orders from some randoms in a spaceship but Arlent Streen could liaise with the defenders and set up a conduit for reconnaissance and advice.

The Travellers could easily penetrate either or both sides' communications. Both are using civilian vehicles with ordinary comm systems. These are designed to talk to one another and to any other comms system in range. Getting into the comms net is no harder than contacting a nearby vehicle on any other day. The Travellers might try to deceive one side, rally the other, offer advice or shout inventive taunts just for the fun of it. It is possible that clever Travellers could take part of a force out of the fight by deception. They might even cause a retreat. This would not be a simple matter of

a single check of course. Whether they try to help or hinder, the Travellers will find themselves using skills such as Tactics, Persuade, Recon and any others that might apply over the course of their efforts.

Monitoring the communications situation will yield information; some vehicles among the rebels are using military-grade encryption. This is not something normally encountered aboard miners' vehicles. The Travellers lack the means to break this encryption – even if they know about the intelligence package at this point it is not designed for cryptoanalysis. They may be able to log samples of the signals to compare them to known encryption packages later, and a successful Average (8+) Electronics (comms) check allows the Travellers to identify one of the vehicles using encrypted communications. This can be attempted every phase of the battle. If the Travellers can directly or indirectly take these vehicles out – such as by identifying one as a primary target to the other side – they will impede the rebels greatly as these are command vehicles crewed by Ine Givar operatives.

Spoofing the rebels' communications or otherwise causing confusion increases the Victory DM by +1, or +2 if the Travellers do something particularly clever. Eliminating one or more command vehicles increases Victory by +2. It also makes post-conflict reconciliation more likely as the Ine Givar operatives would otherwise have pushed for harsher treatment of the defeated population or might have carried out an atrocity themselves.

BATTLE PHASE 2: CRATER FIASCO

Some of the rebels attempt to launch a flanking movement through the Irkhar Crater. This goes well at first; a couple of ATVs and some smaller vehicles leaping into the crater from the far wall. This dramatic entrance goes awry when the first buggy lands in a deep dust pool and simply vanishes. Some of the rebels stop and try to get their comrade out; others press more cautiously forward.

The rescuers are sitting targets, clearly identified as rebels. The Travellers could take them out easily with starship weapons. On the other hand they are trying to prevent a comrade from meeting a horrible death. The rebels will agree to a truce in order to attempt a rescue and the vehicles pushing across the crater are only too glad to retreat in this case. There are some defenders on the far wall of the crater who will have to be persuaded to hold their fire but if this can be done it could be extended to an agreement that the Irkhar Crater will not be used as a route of advance.

If the Travellers join the rescue attempt, they might try lowering someone on a line from their ship. The buggy driver can be found by feeling the vibrations of his panicked attempts to struggle through the dust or using advanced sensors in a creative manner. Visibility in the dust is zero but once the driver is found it should be possible to get a line round him and lift him out.

The Travellers' actions at the crater will not affect the Victory DM; the route is unviable and the rebels will fall back with casualties whatever the Travellers do. However, blasting the rescuers will result in bitter resentment among the rebels which may lead to later troubles. If the Travellers passively assist, such as by providing sensor data to the rescuers or talking them through a return across the dangerous crater, at least some rebels will be more favourably inclined towards reconciliation. Active assistance involving some risk may win the Travelers some unlikely friends.

BATTLE PHASE 3: MISSILES INCOMING!

The distant Ine Givar missile launchers are brought into play. If the Travellers' ship is high enough to be tracked it will be engaged intermittently with missiles, likely with no more success than previously. Missiles will also be targeted on Medianne. Starship missiles are not intended to be launched in a ballistic arc on a low-gravity planet and are not very accurate in this role. However, they are very destructive and a city is a big target.

Three salvoes are fired at the city during the battle, each consisting of 1D missiles. Each missile that is not intercepted makes a normal attack roll, with success indicating it hit something and penetrated the city's micrometeorite armour. Misses come down between building complexes or outside the city. They may cause damage and casualties but are not sufficient to affect the outcome of the battle.

Each missile that hits the city reduces Victory by -1; it is possible that a missile salvo will produce an instant surrender. The Travellers can engage the missile salvoes or have AutoGunner do it. Each salvo is in range for D3 starship combat rounds before impact and each turret can engage one missile per round. Other solutions are possible, ranging from improvised electronic warfare to putting the Travellers' ship in the way of a missile. Such heroic actions will impress the World Board greatly, if they survive, but run contrary to the Travellers' mission brief. A damaged ship will be less impressive to clients encountered later in the voyage, although the Travellers may be able to turn that to advantage by presenting the story of how the damage occurred in the right light.

If the Travellers do not attempt to counter this threat the Referee has two choices. If the attacks proceed without interference, Victory will continue to drop. If it reaches -10 the city surrenders. So be it; the Travellers had a chance to alter the outcome and did not. If the Referee prefers, the rebels may be very short of missiles and stop their attacks after Victory reaches -6 or so. In this case they are assumed to be holding their last missiles in reserve and may do something with them later. This may be a revenge attack or a shot at the Travellers' ship.

BATTLE PHASE 4: FLANKING ATTACK

As the chaotic battle around the ridge unfolds, a force of rebels pushes through the rough ground on the eastern flank. They are on foot and began their endeavour as an attempt to slip around to engage defender vehicles from an unexpected direction. However, it became apparent that smaller vehicles could be guided through the broken ground and a snake of mining buggies is now entering the area and will eventually emerge to make a dash for the excavation site or the city itself.

There are some defenders positioned in the broken area but not enough to stop the attack for long. Unless the Travellers specifically watch the flank they are unlikely to notice anything happening at first, but sooner or later they will become aware of what is happening. The World Board might ask for help, or the Travellers may intercept signals from the embattled defenders.

What the Travellers do about this, if anything, is up to them. The rear elements of the rebel force are easy to identify and could be targeted with starship weapons. This is like shooting fish in the proverbial barrel and produces a precipitous retreat. The Travellers might also try to bring down some of the rocks to create a barrier. This will reduce casualties and may cut off the personnel who are already through the broken ground. Other options are possible, ranging from doing nothing to flying up additional troops to assist the defenders or getting down on the ground to join the defence.

If the Travellers do not intervene, the rebels break through and are able to impede the defenders as they fall back from the ridge. In this case Victory is reduced by -2. Halting the attack with some casualties, such as by blocking the advance route with rubble, increases Victory by +1. Heavy casualties, such as those caused by starship weapons fired at personnel trapped in close terrain, may inspire some rebels to harbour a bitter grudge.

BATTLE PHASE 5: COUNTERATTACK

The battle becomes a confused affair, with some elements of both sides engaged in a running fight from the ridge to the excavation facility. In the midst of the chaos some of the defenders' vehicles rally into a coherent group and launch a determined counterattack. Their small arms fire is effective against personnel riding open mining buggies but does little damage to heavier vehicles. Nonetheless, the counterattack punches through towards the ridge. The Travellers may note a factor in this conflict they had not recognised before; some vehicles are pulling out of the fight with little actual damage. A hail of bullets might do nothing more than chip the windows of an ATV but it may be enough to make the crew want to pull back. Some vehicles are destroyed by grenades or caused to crash but for the most part this is a battle of morale and determination rather than firepower.

The counterattack begins well enough, with a couple of enemy vehicles driven out of the fight and another caused to crash, but soon it becomes bogged down. One-by-one, the defenders' vehicles are pummelled into wrecks by rebel grenade attacks or forced to withdraw. Amid the chaos of the counterattack, one of the ATVs ends up on its side with injured personnel inside. It is leaking air and broadcasting a distress call. Another defender vehicle tries to return to assist but is driven off.

If the Travellers attempt a rescue they will have to get four injured defenders out of an ATV which is lying on its side in the middle of a battle. This might be quite a challenge but would win the Travellers favour with the World Board. During the rescue they come under fire from a party of rebels including one with a grenade launcher. The Travelers might fight back or try to negotiate a truce. The Ine Givar operatives among the rebels are vicious and dedicated but the rebels are much more likely to be merciful.

If the Travellers do nothing to assist, the scene plays out differently. A party of rebels abandons the fight and clambers onto the ATV to drag their enemies to safety. As they are bringing the last casualty out a guided missile strikes the ATV, killing rescuers and victims alike. The Travellers will be able to positively identify the launching vehicle as a rebel-crewed one. This incident does not affect Victory but it may increase the level of bloodshed which is what the Ine Givar want.

BATTLE PHASE 6: THE EXCAVATION FACILITY

The excavation facility is the key to the defence. It is targeted by rocket-propelled grenades and the odd missile but is very solidly built and able to take a lot

of hits. The defenders are at first rather liberal with their ammunition but soon begin to run short. This necessitates desperate supply runs out from the city. The excavation plant is subjected to ground assaults as well, with hand-to-hand fighting in places on the ore conveyors.

It is recommended that each Traveller be given one last chance to contribute to the defence of Medianne – or the attack on it, if that suits their purposes. If there are only two or three Travellers they may be given an additional chance. If the Travellers are not inclined to try some of the following options they can be used as scenes by the Referee, indicating the ferocity of the fighting without affecting the outcome of the battle.

A Traveller who attempts one of these options may make an Average (8+) check using a relevant skill. Victory is modified by the Effect. This assumes the Traveller's actions are plausible and relevant. The Referee should give the Travellers some leeway here – a single rifle shot can turn a battle depending on who it hits, so there is room for both large-scale and small-scale actions.

GENERAL FIGHTING: Defenders shoot down at enemy vehicles, trying to puncture tyres or shatter windscreens, and have the occasional success. Improvised bombs made from mining explosives are hurled by defenders, whose aim is rather random. Rebels take up positions of cover and shoot back whilst their vehicles try to push on towards the city. The situation is fluid until, suddenly, it is not – it will change when the Referee determines the victors of the battle. Within moments, it will be clear what the outcome will be. Until that point, the general fighting will be the backdrop to whatever the Travellers do. Travellers who get stuck in during the general fighting can use an appropriate weapon or other skill to perform some noteworthy feat.

IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVES: The defenders could turn the tide of the battle if they can suddenly inflict heavy casualties on the rebels on break an assault that otherwise looks likely to succeed. One possible gambit would be to plant charges in such a way as to hurl a shower of small rock fragments at enemy personnel. This will also affect open buggies but cannot do much harm to an ATV unless a larger charge is used. The defenders might think of this or other gambits but it is better if the Travellers come up with it themselves. They might either plant the charges themselves or direct someone to do so. Other explosive options include dropping satchel charges onto enemy ATVs or reckless actions such as using a vacc suit manoeuvring system to fly in the low gravity to land on an enemy vehicle and place the charge manually. Explosive antics naturally use the Explosives skill.

DIRECTED FIRE: The defenders lack military experience and are trying to disable enemy vehicles with sheer firepower. If the Travellers can advise on weak points or coordinate the fire of several defenders they may obtain a better result. The Travellers could use Tactics (military) or a weapon-related skill to direct a group of defenders.

HAND-TO-HAND: The rebels are attempting to storm the excavation plant, clearing defenders from the gantries and ore conveyors. This is a scramble, balancing on precarious footholds firing one-handed, or a close combat with pistols, knives and tools. A Traveller could make quite the difference defending or clearing a key location. Vacc-suited brawling normally uses the Melee skill.

CASEVAC: Less fighty Travellers might busy themselves extracting casualties. This is risky and Ine Givar operatives might choose to attack the medics just to increase the overall level of hatred between the factions. However, most personnel on both sides will try to avoid harming obvious angels of mercy and might actively protect them. Medical assistance and casualty evacuation does not affect Victory but may assist with reconciliation providing the Travellers are making few distinctions. If they help only one side's wounded they will win favour from that faction but the other may resent them for it.

LEADERSHIP AND TACTICAL GUIDANCE: The Travellers will by now have realised how inexperienced and generally inept both sides are. A Traveller willing to get down among the fighting can use Leadership to rally a group of friendlies or Tactics to direct them effectively. Someone aboard a starship can offer tactical guidance using the vessel's sensors.

STEALTH AND SUBTLETY: If the Travellers can identify leaders or Ine Givar operatives (even if they do not know what they are as yet) they might eliminate a few key figures. This might involve sniping or a sneaky assassination after infiltrating the enemy. A suitable check (a weapons-related skill or Stealth most likely) imposes its Effect on Victory.

ELECTRONIC WARFARE AND PSYOPS: Travellers can also affect the course of the battle remotely. It may be possible to improvise some form

of electronic warfare or interfere with the enemy's communications. Even just yelling randomly over the enemy's communications channel will disrupt their command and control – such as it is. More subtle psychological operations can be carried out by giving false information or trying to undermine morale. That can be done by just telling enemies they are going to die but talented Travellers might be able to fake a retreat or the sounds of a surrender.

REFEREEING THE ENDGAME

The last phase of the Battle for Medianne will likely determine the fate of the world and the Travellers are centre stage if they want to be. Some or all of them might be aboard the ship, others on the ground. It may be that the Travellers all take to the field and use Autocrew to direct their ship, acting as missile defence for Medianne.

The default option throughout all this is for the Referee to describe a developing situation and the Travellers to react to it. This can be as detailed as seems desirable; some groups will want to play out a desperate knife battle atop the excavation machinery, others will prefer to make a skill check to determine the outcome of the phase and move on. For some groups, the narrative can go a step further. Providing the Travellers are not too silly they can be permitted to narrate their actions and the results based on the Effect of their check. This can be phrased as an answer to the question; 'what did you do during the Battle of Medianne'.

'I was up on the excavator gantry, two rounds in my rifle and a slow leak in my suit. Shot one hostile, batted another off the conveyor with my rifle butt. Big guy came at me with a heavy-duty rocksplitter drill. After that things got kinda tough…'

'Me and Foxy were pulling survivors out of a wrecked ATV. Some of the rebels spotted us… thought we were in trouble but they righted a buggy for us to put the wounded in and walked us out of the combat zone. Hope those guys made it.'

'I jammed enemy comms. As in, 45-minute blues jam with an epic saxophone solo! Want me to sign your shirt?'

The Travellers can contribute to the battle according to their nature and if they get into the spirit of the narrative they will get to supply their own ideas. This can be used to test the waters for the future – not all groups can handle telling their own story, in which case a more conventional incident-and-response model should be used.

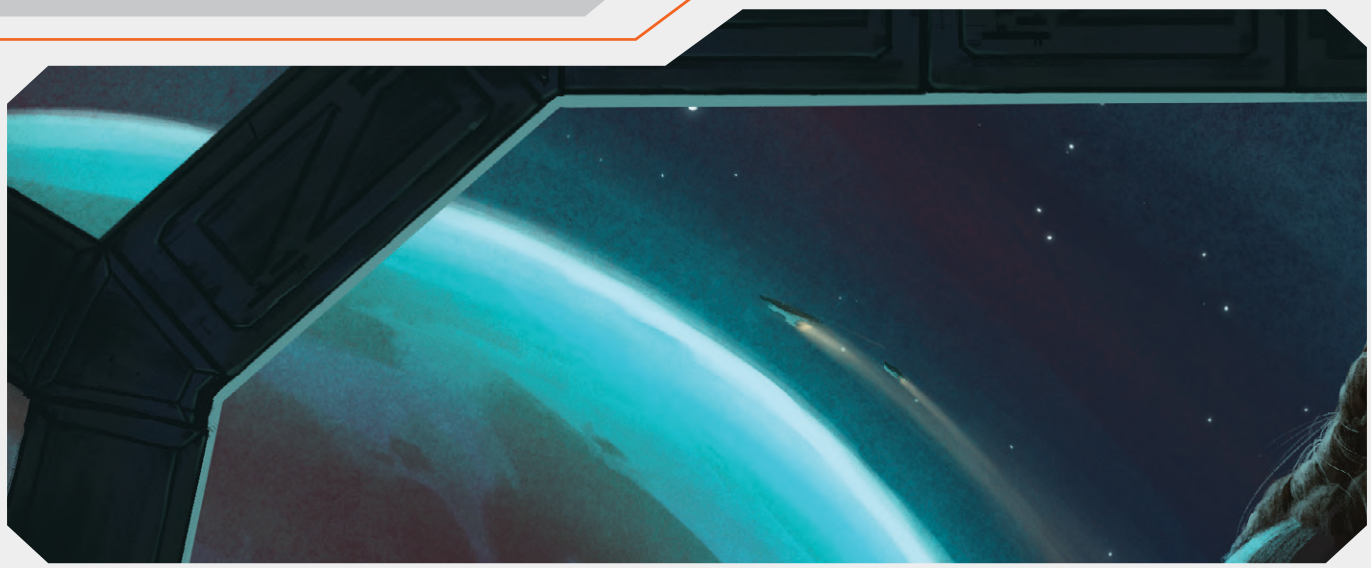
THE FATE OF DINOM

At the climax of the battle for the excavation facility the Referee should determine the outcome of the battle. The system below is recommended but if desirable it can be entirely disregarded in favour of whatever outcome the Referee wants or feels to be appropriate. If the Travellers' actions were heroic but the dice hate them, the Referee might decide their chosen side won anyway. The default option is to use Victory as a DM on a 2D check. If the Travellers took actions that influenced Victory they may be able to swing the battle.

The outcome of this check determines the overall situation. Even if they have taken Medianne the rebels know that Rhylan will be harder to capture and are likely to be dismayed by the level of casualties they have suffered. The surviving members of the World Board, for their part, are worried the rebels might succeed and do not want to suffer further losses – financial or personnel. They would be willing to send people to fight for distant Medianne but combat on their doorstep with a prospect of being captured does not appeal.

Victory Determination

2D + DMs	Result
0 or less	Total collapse of the defence. Areas of the city surrender or go over to the rebels before the leaders can make any decisions. Medianne is entirely in the hands of the rebels.
1–3	The defence collapses into rout, with rebel forces entering the city in close pursuit. The city's leaders hold out long enough to try to negotiate but are overrun. Medianne is entirely in the hands of the rebels.
4–6	The defenders are driven back and scattered but manage to put up some resistance. Most of the city falls quickly, with minimal resistance remaining.
7–9	The defenders are pushed back, some making it into the city and some driven off in rout. Some resistance continues.
10–12	The defenders are driven back into the city but retain control of most of it.
13–15	The rebel advance is halted, although barely. Medianne remains in the hands of the World Board.
16+	The rebel advance is broken. Their forces pull back leaving Medianne in the hands of the World Board.



Thus as the battle for Medianne winds down, both sides are willing to talk. A truce is declared, although there will be incidents of violence from time-to-time. These will be worse and more frequent if the Travellers took actions that antagonised one side, such as shooting at people who were trying to rescue casualties and the violence will be mitigated if the Travellers were seen to be merciful or if they eliminated many Ine Givar operatives.

The Ine Givar want a continuation of the conflict, ideally ending in the establishment of an ostensibly democratic Workers Council which they can influence to cause trouble for the Imperium and perhaps eventually secede. If they cannot achieve this then more bloodshed suits their purposes. They will try to disrupt negotiations and cause incidents if they can. The Travellers might end up getting involved with finding out who was responsible and hunting them down, or they may prefer to leave it to the authorities.

If the Travellers want to stay and take part in the negotiations they can, although they do have a mission to complete. The Travellers' ship might be the nearest thing to a neutral place for discussions, although that depends on their actions so far. Whichever side ends up controlling Medianne has a huge advantage in the negotiations but the outcome is by no means certain. The most likely long-term situation is a sort of coalition between the workers and the owners, in which the World Board is expanded to include leaders from the Workers Council and a percentage of profits will be diverted to welfare funds and other projects designed to improve quality of life. In this event, there will be resistance from the remaining Ine Givar operatives and a great deal of tension for years to come. There is no guarantee Dinom will not see further violence.

If the workers and the World Board cannot come to an agreement, a standoff develops with the workers controlling Napan and the World Board in Rhylan. Medianne will be a disputed area, ostensibly controlled by one side or the other but subject to sabotage, rioting and infiltration. Large-scale conflict is unlikely for some time as both sides have taken heavy losses and neither profits from further violence. If one faction does get the idea it can win, renewed warfare is probable.

The fate of Medianne is a guide to the future of Dinom – if the World Board retains control things will eventually return to how they were, with some concessions. If the city fell to the rebels, society on Dinom will change considerably. This has consequences for the Travellers. A World Board that retains control may someday choose to buy starships and will look favourably upon RVSC. A weakened World Board will not be in a position to do so. In short, the Travellers do not benefit financially from a rebel victory and RVSC will not be pleased with them.

The Referee must determine the level of hatred engendered by the conflict, using the Travellers' actions and experiences as a guide. Bloodshed breeds hatred, and hatred may lead to continued resistance or atrocities. Reconciliation will take a long time in any case but notable acts of mercy will help build bridges and ultimately repair society. This will help indicate whether the conflict sputters on or takes some other course. It may be that the Travellers return to Dinom for further adventures, perhaps rooting out Ine Givar operatives or leading a resurgent worker rebellion in a drive on Rhylan. There is a whole campaign to be played out on this world, perhaps leading to the Travellers taking on Arlent Streen for control of the planet. This is, however beyond the scope of *Whispers on the Abyss*.

ACROSS THE BORDER

After their adventure on Dinom, the Travellers still have a mission to complete. The most important potential client of the voyage is the government of Arden, eight parsecs away. The quickest route is by way of Phlume, Rangent and Pequan, taking advantage of the Travellers' jump-2 range. However, there are no meetings scheduled until Arden so the Travellers can go any way they want and there is no reason the Travellers could not add in additional stops. They will have to justify these to the RVSC personnel aboard, which is likely to mean demonstrating there is some prospect of showing off the ship to someone who might want to buy one, or carrying out some important errand along the way.

The Travellers might also want to bypass systems where they anticipate difficulties. More than a couple of additional stops will generate objections, forcing the Travellers to come up with ever-better justifications for their decisions. This part of the campaign is freeform and may include additional adventures if the Referee desires it. Profiles for other worlds along the way are presented in the sections on the Vilis and Lanth subsectors, starting on page 26. The incidents associated with the worlds named below can be moved elsewhere if the Travellers take a different route. They do not need to be presented in any particular order.

PHLUME

Phlume is an agricultural world with a population of about seven million. Its own technology is of the late pre-starfaring era, which creates ideal conditions for Imperial corporations to sell advanced goods at lucrative prices to a population with enough money to buy them in quantity. Phlume's modest starport sees considerable numbers of jump-1 trade ships out of Extolay, some of which push on to Tionale before turning around. Trade is brisk but cargo volumes small. Relatively few vessels proceed to spinward; most ships using the Spinward Main turn coreward towards Regina. Phlume has seen a recent increase in vessels flagged out of the so-called Federation of Arden, including some formerly Imperial-registered ships.

PHLUME

Profile	C887624-8	
Starport	C	Routine
Size	8	12,800km
Atmosphere	8	Dense
Hydrosphere	7	70%
Population	6	Millions
Government Type	2	Participating Democracy
Law Level	4	Light assault weapons prohibited
Technology Level	8	Quality Computers

The orbital component of Phlume's starport is little more than a fuelling station, with all trade and recreation taking place at the downport. The world has no system defence forces of its own, so a standing deployment from the subsector fleet is maintained, usually a destroyer plus one or two escorts or patrol corvettes. Small as this deployment might seem to the casual observer, it absorbs multiple ships that could otherwise be useful elsewhere. For every vessel on a standing deployment another must be ready to replace it. Maintenance and transit times must also be considered.

The Travellers have no meetings scheduled on Phlume and may wish to simply refuel and move on. An Imperial-registered ship headed outward is the least likely of all passing vessels to be subject to a search, so in all probability the Travellers will receive an automated greeting and advisory that they are in a border system. Whatever the Travellers decide to do here they are around long enough to suffer another of those strange sensor glitches. This time the data comes together faster and indicates three ships.

VESSEL TYPE: Chrysanthemum-class, 98% Confidence.
VESSEL IDENTITY: *Kiiki*.
LOCATION: Starport Patrol Pattern.
CONDITION: Operational. Weapons Unpowered.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Responding to civilian transponder signals.
ANALYSIS: Vessel is deployed as guardship for the starport in this system.

VESSEL TYPE: Gazelle-class, 96% Confidence.
VESSEL IDENTITY: *Vranderbiest*.
LOCATION: Distant Orbit.
CONDITION: Operational. Weapons Unpowered.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: EMCON conditions, not responding to civilian transponder signals.
ANALYSIS: Vessel is covertly observing traffic, standing ready for surprise intercept of suspect vessels.

VESSEL TYPE: Type-T Patrol Corvette, 81% Confidence.
VESSEL IDENTITY: *Ishlaar*.
LOCATION: Outsystem.
CONDITION: Operational.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Not responding to civilian transponder signals.
ANALYSIS: Vessel is conducting a distant sweep as part of routine security operations.

Unless the Travellers attract attention they will not be considered suspicious. They will be allowed to proceed unimpeded but may be puzzled by the data they are receiving about Imperial Navy vessels.

RANGENT

Rangent is almost entirely covered in seas, which are farmed to provide the world's only exports. A few small cities exist on the available land masses and in shallow water, from which huge factory-ships make long cruises and submersibles tend the world's extensive aquaculture industry. There is no starport as such, just landing sites on some of the larger islands where seafood and seaweed products can be trans-shipped. Smaller starships can land directly on the factory-ships as they ply the world's oceans, taking on cargo without ever interacting with the world's population. As a result, the five million or so inhabitants are largely isolated from the wider universe and uninterested in offworld events. Almost the entire population is employed by the Rangent Corporation, which provides a governmental function but is first and foremost a commercial entity.

RANGENT

Profile	E67A612-7	
Starport	E	Frontier Installation
Size	6	9,600km
Atmosphere	7	Standard; Tainted
Hydrosphere	A	Water World
Population	6	Millions
Government Type	1	Company/Corporation
Law Level	2	Portable energy weapons prohibited
Technology Level	7	Miniaturised Electronics

The Travellers will note that whilst there are a lot of prospecting and mining vessels in the system, through traffic is very low. It is also clear that someone has been waiting for a passing ship. They are contacted on a civilian band by someone named Jeffe Khalid, who offers to pay over the odds for passage out of the system as soon as possible. There are not alerts about a person of that name and Jeffe explains that he has been stuck here for weeks after a falling-out with the crew of a free trader named *Burnished Gold*. There is a ship of that name in the databases and inquiries do show it passed through here a few times in the previous couple of years.

Jeffe was a crewmember aboard *Burnished Gold*, he says, and hopes to get to a port – any port – where he can find a ship to sign on with. He has some money and is willing to pay over the odds for passage. He offers Cr10000 for middle passage but can be bargained up to Cr25000. All he wants is to get to a Class B or A port with a decent amount of through traffic. If the Travellers take him on, they will find Jeffe to be an unassuming generally hassle-free passenger. He will even offer to do jobs around the ship, as if he is trying to make himself useful enough to be hired as crew.

PEQUAN

Pequan is a habitable world populated by around seven million people. Its mid-tech society is ruled by an oppressive dictatorship which maintains cool but cordial relations with all local powers. Pequan does not seem to favour one over another but has been the site of in a series of incidents involving attacks on shipping or harassment of trader crews on-planet. Some of

PEQUAN

Profile	E5656B9-4	
Starport	E	Frontier Installation
Size	5	8,000km
Atmosphere	6	Standard
Hydrosphere	5	50%
Population	6	Millions
Government Type	B	Non-Charismatic Dictator
Law Level	9	Possession of weapons outside the home prohibited
Technology Level	4	External Combustion

these incidents have led to periods of poor relations with other worlds or interstellar polities but ultimately Pequan's dictator needs what little trade comes through and cannot risk alienating too many ship operators.

The Pequan system possesses no gas giants and the mainworld has only a landing area with no facilities. This could make the system a barrier to jump-1 traffic but, many decades ago, a group of entrepreneurs solved the problem and began making good money into the bargain. A fuelling station was set up orbiting one of the system's rockball planets, kept fed by small ships collecting water ice from the system's planetoid belts. The station operators charge a premium for fuel. This enables them to support their own fuel supply vessels and even attract a few freelancers. Ice-mining is a boring way to make a living but it is not difficult.

The Pequan fuel station was independent for over a century but has recently been bought out by a group of outside investors. It is an open secret they are based out of Arden; the facility is slowly receiving a makeover intended to remind all passing ships that the Federation of Arden is real and present. Vessels registered out of Arden are overcharged for fuel but not nearly as much as non-Arden ships.

As the Travellers are refuelling, another 'sensor glitch' takes place. This one takes a little longer to resolve than the previous few.

VESSEL TYPE: Chazhdr-class, 67% Confidence.
VESSEL IDENTITY: Unknown.
LOCATION: Orbiting Mainworld.
CONDITION: Operational. Weapons Unpowered.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Not responding to civilian transponder signals.
ANALYSIS: No analysis possible at this time.

The Chazhdr-class is a Zhodani light cruiser. This example is only two jumps from Zhodani space and has all manner of reasons to be present in a neutral system. Cruisers from the Imperium and the Consulate make 'goodwill visits' to neutral worlds as a means of projecting what is known as soft power. The presence of this vessel may alarm the Travellers but all it is doing at present is conducting diplomacy.

What the Travellers cannot know at this point is that other cruisers have moved into systems between Arden and the Imperial border. Having a couple wandering around the region showing the flag is normal but there are far too many for this to be a normal operation. In fact, these cruisers are scouts for the Zhodani battle fleet and have a secondary purpose of intercepting couriers or reconnaissance vessels bearing news of an impending attack. Once the Imperial Navy collates all reports of cruiser activity along the borders it will be obvious something is happening, but these ships will be able to deny the Imperials clear information on Zhodani strength and movements for a time. The Travellers will find out about this soon enough.

JEFFE KHALID

Jeffe Khalid is a legend – legend in the sense that the term is used for a cover identity in the intelligence community. His real name is Karl Rashid – Lieutenant-Commander Karl Rashid, Imperial Navy. An honours graduate of the Deneb naval academy, Karl served for a time in the engineering department of various warships but soon found his talents lay elsewhere. He rapidly advanced through the ranks of the intelligence service to become a coordinator and was assigned to the field office at Arden. His job is supposed to be analysis and data collation, not field work, but he decided to personally check out rumours of strange activity along the border. This is a violation of the rule that senior operatives must not place themselves in danger of capture but in the intelligence world rules can be rather malleable.

Karl inserted himself as a crewmember on the apparently legitimate free trader *Burnished Gold* but became suspicious about the crew. He engineered an argument and got himself dumped at the next port, and has been trying to figure out how to get back to his field office without attracting attention. He is also deeply worried about ship movements along the border. He has no solid evidence but the patterns are changing, as if someone knows something is about to happen. Factoring in all the rebellions and industrial troubles going on at the moment and a Zhodani disruption campaign seems likely. Karl does not think war is about to break out but that is always a possibility.

If he can, Karl will quietly return to Arden and put his suspicions in his regular report. It may be a little late for that, however. He will prefer to remain on Arden and feed information back to Imperial Naval Intelligence if he can but if his identity is discovered he and possibly other members of his staff will need to get out quickly. Karl has no reason to suspect the Travellers are anything other than a corporate team sent to sell starships, although if he sees one of the 'sensor glitches' he will recognise the system and begin to wonder why the Travellers have it. This could be a 'crossed lines' situation, with the Travellers also working for the INI, or could be something more complex or sinister. Karl will not reveal who he really is or any insider knowledge unless he is certain the Travellers can be trusted.

JEFFE KHALID/LT-COMMANDER KARL RASHID

STR 6 **DEX** 7 **END** 8 **INT** 8 **EDU** 11 **SOC** 3/8
Admin 1, Athletics (dexterity) 1, Carouse 2, Deception 3, Electronics (sensors) 2, Engineer (power) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 1, Investigate 2, Mechanic 1, Pilot (spacecraft) 1, Tactics (naval) 1, Vacc Suit 1

Weapons: Semi-automatic pistol (3D-3)
Armour: Vacc Suit (+8)
Equipment: Shipboard maintenance tools

Jeffe presents as a down-at-heel starship crewmember with SOC 3. Karl is rather more urbane, with SOC 8.

ARDEN

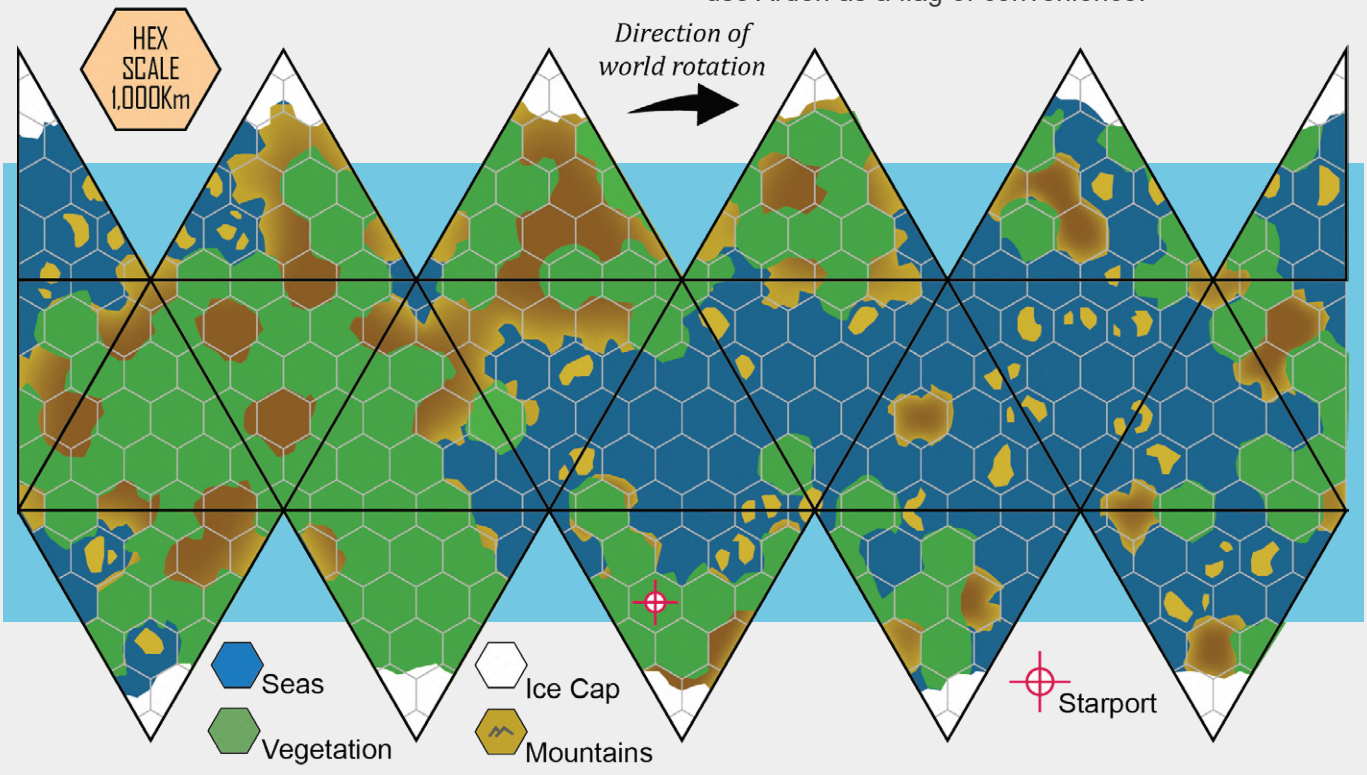
Lying roughly midway between the borders of the Zhodani Consulate and the Imperium, Arden has a unique role as a conduit for trade and diplomacy, and is attempting to leverage this to create a small interstellar polity. The idea is presented in terms of a neutral buffer state which would benefit both major powers but the obvious reality is that Arden simply wants to become more powerful.

Arden was apparently settled during the Rule of Man era – or perhaps even before its creation – by dissident or exiled Vilani. The arrival of Imperial colonists in 290 added some new cultural influences to the mix and today's Ardenian society bears little resemblance to the culture of the First or Second Imperium. Government is theoretically at least a little democratic, with officials elected by mass vote. However, candidates are all drawn from the same elite segment of Arden's society so there is little difference between their views.

The ruling elite of Arden are all members of the Arden Society, which is dedicated to maintaining control over the homeworld and expanding influence to other star systems. Society members control businesses on nearby worlds and own a number of private trade ships. They are particularly interested in acquiring a shipbuilding capability and in advancing Tech Level in general but in the interim are expanding the world's fleet of commercial vessels. In addition, since Arden imposes tariffs on Imperial vessels, many free traders are being encouraged to use Arden as a flag of convenience.

ARDEN

Profile	B5549CB-9	
Starport	B	Good
Size	5	8,000km
Atmosphere	5	Thin
Hydrosphere	4	40%
Population	9	Billions
Government Type	C	Charismatic Oligarchy
Law Level	B	Rigid control of civilian movement
Technology Level	9	Anti-Gravity



ESCAPE FROM ARDEN

The Travellers have an important meeting scheduled at Arden. The Arden Society is interested in purchasing multiple starships in order to expand its influence over the surrounding systems. The obvious requirement is for jump-1 traders but there is also a need for vessels that can act as light escorts and patrol ships. A fleet of refurbished Type R subsidised merchants would be ideal and the Travellers should have had a good chance to convince the authorities to begin negotiations. However, events have taken a sharp turn.

Upon arriving in the Arden system, the Travellers are greeted as normal by starport traffic control and directed into an approach pattern. They may not be paying much attention but sooner or later they will notice something is not right. First of all, another 'sensor glitch' takes place. This is apparently triggered by a transponder return from a large vessel close to the orbital port. After a few seconds of jumbled data, a clear readout emerges.

VESSEL TYPE: Chazhdr-class, 99% Confidence.
VESSEL IDENTITY: Dievledl.
LOCATION: Orbiting Mainworld.
CONDITION: OPERATIONAL: Weapons Unpowered.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Responding to civilian transponder signals.
ANALYSIS: Vessel poses no threat. Goodwill visit probable.

There is nothing suspicious about the presence of a Zhodani cruiser at Arden. Both the Consulate and the Imperium have courted Arden for many years, whilst supposedly respecting its neutrality. Zhodani ships are a common sight here and indeed Imperial Naval Intelligence maintains a field office specifically to observe passing Consulate vessels. However, the Travellers will notice something odd about the local traffic pattern… there is none.

Transponder pings produce responses from the usual port utility craft and fighters out on patrol but there are no vessels on an obvious out-to-jump heading. A couple of what might be commercial craft are in orbit or headed up and down around the highport but it seems Arden starport is under some kind of lockdown. The automated greeting from the port gives no indication of an alert.

The Travellers' sensor systems suddenly begin to go berserk. Data floods the screens, gradually resolving itself into readouts on dozens of craft. Most are small, such as fighters and utility cutters. Some of these are unusually far out, as if in position to intercept incoming or outgoing vessels. There are a few system defence boats, mostly of old Imperial designs, lurking with their transponders off. There are also four ships positively identified as Argacan multipurpose vessels. All are positioned as if on patrol rather than engaging in commercial activity. A force of six paramilitary vessels of Vargr design are also in-system. Their transponders are off but the Travellers' ship can still identify them as vessels belonging to the Zueng.

The Travellers should not have this data. Their sensors should not be able to pick up fighters at such a long range, nor to identify them individually without a transponder response. If the Travellers investigate they will find a signal buried in the system's datanet broadcasts. It is heavily encrypted but seems to be coming from the highport. This signal is feeding their ship data that has been gathered by the Imperial Navy intelligence team at the highport… and their ship is responding.

If Jeffe Khalid is on board and sees what is going on, he recognises what has happened. This is a supposedly covert data transfer from his field office and the ship should not be responding. He will of course want to know *why* the Travellers have an intelligence package aboard their vessel but more urgently he needs to know why their ship is now making an immense data dump and what it is transmitting.

Attempts to shut off the data dump do not work. It might be possible to isolate antennae and physically disable comms but not quick enough to prevent the information transfer. If the Travellers want to look at what they are transmitting it is horrifying. Every ship they have encountered has been logged and not just the ones where they suffered a 'glitch'. Older data includes dispositions of the entire sector fleet reserve at Macene as well as the vessels deployed at Jae Tellona and Rhylanor. The system defence forces in these systems are also laid out in glorious detail. Vessels which would normally return nothing more than 'Imperial Navy

Warship' are named and identified, sometimes with extensive notes on their history and known defects or damage. The Travellers' ship has just dumped the biggest 'pinch' of data on the Imperial Navy's Spinward Marches Fleet ever stolen… but who received it?

The Travellers cannot know at this time but Jeffe Khalid's field team was compromised months ago. He only avoided being captured by his ill-advised decision to go into the field. Zhodani Naval Intelligence now has information on Imperial defences. If Khalid knows about any of this he will want to send a coded signal asking if the team has been compromised. He will receive an 'everything normal' response of course but he remains suspicious.

If the Travellers try to talk to traffic control they receive a vague response about a 'temporary traffic lockdown' resulting from 'possible pirate activity'. This is vaguely plausible but unlikely. Traffic control will talk with the Travellers, asking them to head to the highport quickly and avoid sudden changes of course. All vessels will be searched once landed, as a precaution due to the presence of suspected pirates. The port authority expects to have traffic moving in a few hours.

By now the Travellers are likely to be smelling the proverbial rat. Their suspicions will be confirmed when their ship suddenly goes into security lockdown. This is based upon the return-to-port system built into Autocrew but it has been modified. Not even Joachim can over-ride it. The ship veers off course, now headed for a remote landing area on Arden itself. As the Travellers are fighting to get back into their systems, they receive a signal from the Zhodani cruiser. The signal informs the Travellers their ship is being seized as a suspected spy vessel. If they do not resist they will be released unharmed after questioning but their ship will be interned.

If the Travellers do nothing, the Zhodani will keep their word. The ship will auto-land in a remote area and be boarded by Consular Marines. They do not answer questions and will not tolerate interference in their mission but they are not really interested in the Travellers themselves nor any of the crew. Khalid is a person of interest to them, so he will be taken away for interrogation but the Travellers will be asked a few questions about their ship and mission then released. The ship itself is quickly taken over by a Zhodani prize crew who have overrides for the return-to-port system. It is last seen headed out of the system on a jump vector for Consulate space.

The Travellers will find themselves on Arden with only their personal effects and whatever funds they have. They will be watched but are not imprisoned, suggesting there is more to this matter than meets the eye. There is; the Zhodani were expecting a ship with the intelligence package aboard and know the crew are innocent dupes. The Imperials might not be so sure, but that is a problem for another day. The Travellers will witness the arrival of the lead elements of the Zhodani war fleet over Arden and the official recognition of the Federation of Arden by the Zhodani Consulate. These are significant events but the Travellers might do well to avoid them.

REGAINING CONTROL

The return-to-port system has been compromised. Even if the Travellers thought they had disabled Autocrew, the Travellers will find it has been embedded secretly in control systems. Rooting it out is quite a job, requiring finding code hidden within code or disabling a number of systems and using others to take over their function. The override could be removed given enough time but the Travellers do not have that luxury. There are, however, other options.

Joachim cannot help much in terms of the actual programming but his high-level override could be used to conflict the system. Combined with spurious and confusing inputs, the Travellers might use this to cause some elements of the imposed override to produce errors and ultimately crash. Ironically perhaps, the glitches with AutoEngineer might also interfere with the override code.

The Travellers will need to come up with at least three different methods of confusing the system. AutoEngineer's malfunctioning mathematics is one, Joachim's commands are another. Other options include deliberate input of confusing data, requiring an Electronics (computers) check or disabling some of the systems that interact with the vessel's command and control programming. Physically disconnecting or smashing parts of the computer at random might actually work, as the automated rerouting of functions will add an additional layer of confusion.

The other, rather radical, option is a Very Hard Reboot. This means cutting power to the ship's avionics and flight systems for a few minutes – turning it off and on again. If done in flight this has the same effect as confusing the control systems – the ship loses all control and begins to fall out of the sky. All is not lost at this point. Minimal emergency control systems come online after a few seconds, which are

separate from the main flight package and free from interference. They are also not very good, imposing DM-2 on Pilot checks. There is in addition the non-trivial fact that the ship's lifters and drive have no power whilst the system is down.

The pilot will have to rely on the rather small amount of lift produced by Arden's thin atmosphere and use the vessel's aerofins to direct its fall into a controlled descent. The ship will begin to spin as it descends towards the Envain Mountains. On the plus side the Travellers will go off the radar when they get low enough, but impact with the ground seconds later makes that a small triumph.

To correct the spin and set up a dead-stick descent the pilot must succeed in a Difficult (10+) Pilot check, with the DM for minimal controls as noted. Three attempts are possible before impact and time to impact is increased by the Effect of a successful check. Without help this is unlikely but other Travellers can assist depending on their skills.

ENGINEER: There is no power to the lifters and drive but that does not mean no thrust is available. Gravitational induction and field-collapse hysteresis in the lifter system means that a falling ship actually generates a little power which can be used for a burst of thrust. A successful Average (8+) Engineer check allows the engineer to make this available to the pilot for a few seconds. The Effect of this check can be added to the Pilot check each round.

SCIENCE, NAVIGATION, SURVIVAL: Travellers likely to know about wind conditions and weather may be able to predict a wind-tunnel effect in the Greyrock Valley, which runs for much of the length of the mountain chain. Using updraughts from the mountains and increased airflow in the valley might provide a little more lift. The Effect of a successful Average (8+) check can be added to the Pilot check that round.

OTHER GOOD IDEAS: If the Travellers can produce other good ideas and a check to go with them they can help out. Diverting stored power from the life support reserve or some other rather desperate measure might help but creative Travellers should be rewarded. If the margin between crashing and escape is an inspirational saxophone solo then it is up to the Referee to decide if it should be allowed.

The delay in impact buys time for the Travellers to clear their system. A brute-force power reboot succeeds on 8+ on a straight 2D check. This can be attempted each round instead of an attempt to crash the control system. The latter requires a Difficult (10+) Electronics (computers) check. If either succeeds the Travellers have control of their ship once more. The override code will have to be removed from the system somehow but that can wait until they have escaped.

STRANDED ON ARDEN?

With control restored the Travellers find themselves hurtling along the Greyrock Valley, off the radar for a moment, and able to begin their climb to orbit. Their problems are not over, however. As they begin their ascent, jump flashes indicate the arrival of ships… lots of ships. These openly identify themselves as warships of the Zhodani Consulate. This is no goodwill visit by a cruiser; these are battle squadrons centred on a powerful capital ship, with supporting cruisers and destroyers.

A blanket transmission orders all Imperial ships to stand down and be interned, then a rather more formal declaration indicates the Federation of Arden is hereby recognised as a neutral interstellar power by the Zhodani Consulate. If the Federation was a pipe dream before, it is now reality. This is a significant moment in history just for that but it is also the opening of the Fifth Frontier War. The Zhodani are beginning with a significant advantage given to them – albeit unwittingly – by the Travellers.

If the Travellers do not manage to restore control they have one chance at survival – turn the return-to-port system back on and let it get them out of trouble. They will find themselves stranded on Arden once their ship has been interned of course but may be able to leave peacefully. Arden is, after all, neutral territory and the Travellers are still free sophonts. This is not as simple as obtaining passage on a ship, if there are any leaving in the near future. The Travellers will have to slog through Arden's notoriously torturous bureaucracy to obtain their exit visas… and the ship they leave aboard may be a General Products Argacan! That is a story for another day.

ESCAPE FROM ARDEN

The Travellers have a narrow window to escape. The Zhodani fleet jumped short of the planet to allow its considerable number of ships to assemble. There are a few fighters and Zueng ships near the mainworld, plus some system defence boats and four Argacan multipurpose ships bought just a few weeks ago from General Products. If the Travellers arrived by way of a 2-parsec jump they will need to find fuel before jumping out. That means evading pursuit and skimming a gas

giant or cracking ice off an asteroid. The Travellers are off the radar and the situation is fluid at present, so they have a decent chance.

If the Travellers seek to slip away under low power their best option is to lay in a course to coast past the fighter cordon with everything turned right down. This will keep their emissions from being detected unless they are very unlucky but it is slow and nerve-wracking. The first stage of this stealthy escape is to prevent their ship's transponder from giving them away.

Civilian ships have three transponder settings, though most run permanently in Active mode. With an Active transponder a ship broadcasts its identity and heading every few seconds. This enables installations and other ships to plot the progress of vessels and ensure there are no dangerous close passes. The transponder will also 'ping' every few seconds, emitting an interrogative signal that requests transponders in Passive mode to respond.

In Passive mode the ship does not broadcast its position or identity but will respond when 'pinged' by another transponder. Passive mode is not commonly used in high-traffic systems and looks a little suspicious but in areas where pirate attack is a threat it can be useful not to be noticed. To obtain information from a vessel in Passive mode, a ship has to first reveal its own presence, identity and basic information.

The third mode is Covert, in which a ship does not respond to transponder pings at all. This is useful when trying to hide but is considered highly suspicious by most navies. In peacetime a vessel that does not respond to pings is likely to be investigated. Under the present conditions it is entirely possible it will be attacked.

With their transponder in Covert mode the Travellers will only be detected by their ship's emissions. By turning off as much as they can and operating the drive under low power the Travellers may be able to coast past the patrols. Setting up a minimum-power orbit break requires an Average (8+) Astrogation or Pilot check. Once in motion there is little the Travellers can do but wait… and that will be harder for some than others.

One or another of the RVSC personnel may not be able to stand the strain. It is one thing to act in desperation and quite another to sit quietly whilst sensor emissions probe for the Travellers' ship. A panicking crewmember might do something very unwise, such as ordering AutoGunner to power up the weapons and lock them onto a nearby Arden fighter. This will greatly increase the chance of detection.

Providing nobody does anything too stupid or swift corrective action is taken, the Travellers should be able to drift past the cordon and get far enough away to avoid detection. They can then change course to find a suitable fuel source. Gas giant skimming is not an option, meaning the Travellers will have to find an icy asteroid or perhaps find ice on one of the outsystem rockball planets.

ONE LAST PROBLEM

If the Referee thinks the Travellers have suffered enough they may be able to quietly slip out of the Arden system and escape. However, there is one last problem for those who can handle it. One of the Argacan-class vessels purchased by Arden picked up a faint trace of their emissions and has begun looking for them. The Zhodani fleet is quite distant, the Zueng ships are busy provisioning or fuelling and the Travellers are out of range of the starport's fighters. This will be a simple confrontation between two vessels, if it happens at all.

Details for the Argacan are on page 114. The crew are new and still in the process of familiarising themselves with the design. Their skills can be assumed to give DM+1 on all tasks. The Travellers' ship is faster but the Argacan is bigger and more heavily armed. It is possible that the Argacan will be detected whilst it is searching for the Travellers' ship. If so, they may have to hurriedly complete refuelling operations and make ready. If they are still undetected, they might try to slip away. That might lead to a long-range duel as the Travellers try to reach a jump point, or they might escape scot-free. Alternatively, the Travellers might try to ambush their opponent. A straight fight is also a possibility.

The Referee should present this last problem as a campaign finale. Some Traveller groups will want a dramatic victory over that ship that annoyed them so much at the beginning of the campaign. It is not the same one but might still provide catharsis. Other groups might enjoy the subtle victory of slipping away leaving the frustrated Arden crew scanning every rock in the system looking for them. In short, the Referee should use this incident to provide the Travellers with a clear sense of triumph. Their mission has not gone as planned, and they are in a war zone, but at least they can win this fight.

MISSION INCOMPLETE

Once the Travellers have dealt with the pursuing ship, one way or another, they are clear to escape and ponder recent events. RVSC had expected the mission to end

with a sales pitch at Arden and maybe some opportunistic sales attempts on the homeward cruise. Instead, a full-blown interstellar war has broken out. This may create opportunities as well as problems for a starship conversion yard and it will certainly confuse the situation. Orders that might have materialised as a result of the cruise may now be deferred or cancelled. On the other hand, there may be a sudden need for additional naval auxiliaries or escort vessels operated by shipping lines.

The starship marketplace has been turned upside down but business will continue. The Travellers might get a fat bonus in three, five or even ten years' time if a client makes orders based on their efforts, but in the short term the project has been derailed. RVSC will pay the scheduled bonuses for interest in their ships resulting from the cruise – that is only fair – and promises to honour the bonus scheme if sales result, assuming of course the Zhodani do not overrun the sector. In the meantime, the Travellers are offered continued use of the prototype so long as they stay in the Spinward Marches and continue to showcase its capabilities. Any sales that can be traced to the Travellers' actions will be grounds for a bonus.

The Travellers have not been given ownership of the vessel, although at some point they might be. Instead, they can use it as they please, more or less. The AutoPurser wipes all company funds from the ship's system – basically setting up a transfer through the courier system that will eventually put the funds into RVSC's coffers. To replace these funds the system sets up an interest-free loan of MCr1. The Travellers can use this money how they please, which will no doubt include upkeep of the vessel. They can speculate it, invest it or spend it on shoes if they like, but it has to repaid someday. Wise Travellers will use this as seed money to make more or to keep their ship flying.

This of course assumes the Travellers return to Imperial space and try to settle with RVSC. With the overrides disabled they can do as they will, although the RVSC people will want to go home unless they have become very good friends with the Travellers. The ship is likely to be posted 'missing, presumed lost' given the circumstances, so the Travellers could probably continue to operate it for some time before having to admit they are still alive. In this case AutoPurser will stop paying the Travellers and handling expenses 10 weeks after leaving Arden. The Travellers will find themselves with a ship but zero money. Still, a good, fast ship can always turn a profit somehow. There will surely be many opportunities in the turbulent times to come.

There is also the question of the intelligence package. Imperial Naval Intelligence still does not know the Travellers have it. If they found out they would try to take it back and would view Travellers who did not immediately try to return it as soon as it was discovered as highly suspect at best. Alternatively, if the Travellers seem amenable, they might be tasked with doing some covert intelligence-gathering on behalf of the Imperial Navy. Those who were involved in getting the device aboard the prototype know it is there and will want to reclaim it. The Travellers might do a deal if they are so inclined, or may end up on the run from everyone who wants the device. What they do about this is their choice.

As to the payable bonuses, they are summarised on the Bonus Payments table, applicable to each Traveller.

Bonus Payments

Bonus	Amount	Criteria
Jae Tellona	Cr25000	General Procurement shows an interest.
Jae Tellona Enhanced	Additional Cr25000	General Procurement shows enhanced interest.
Dinom	Cr0	The Travellers were not at fault but no sales are likely now.
Dinom Enhanced	Cr100000	The Travellers helped keep the world government in power, making RVSC look good to the Imperial authorities as well as possibly setting up a chance for ship sales.
Arden	Cr0	General Products had already secured a contract and a major war broke out. No bonus is payable under the circumstances.

The Travellers have witnessed the outbreak of the Fifth Frontier War. It will continue to develop around them over the coming years. They have a good ship and a lot of opportunities, and have gained a number of useful contacts. What they do next is entirely up to them. They could, of course, run far away and wait for the shooting to stop but that means missing the chance to be centre stage in great events that will alter the course of history. Indeed, if the Travellers remain in the Spinward Marches they might be able to influence the fate of worlds or even the outcome of the war itself.

A range of equipment is available to the Travellers and their associates in the course of this campaign. Much of it is standard and the Travellers will undoubtedly have their own kit. The items presented here vary a little from the standard version.

RVSC VACC SUITS & ATTIRE

THE *ABYSS* COLLECTION

RVSC has a dress uniform, like many corporations. It is somewhere between a military uniform and a business suit, consisting of a double-breasted jacket with vestigial epaulettes. Management-level personnel wear an aiguilette on the right shoulder and all personnel have a military-style 'fruit salad' with award ribbons for long or exceptional service. The corporation permits ribbons from other services to be worn in this display, which is taking a liberty in the eyes of many other observers. The corporation justifies this by referring to the ancient practice of allowing police personnel who were military veterans to wear their ribbons on duty uniform.

The jacket is in very dark grey, as is the associated legwear. By tradition, personnel may wear trousers or a long skirt, or a kilt in the company tartan. This is completely made-up of course but features on a great many items of merchandise. A waistcoat in dark grey or company tartan is worn, with a white shirt or blouse. This uniform is for formal occasions and can be toned down to normal business-casual by removing the waistcoat and switching to a single-breasted jacket.

Most personnel are issued a formal dress uniform at regular intervals or upon submitting a valid request for replacement. Those who may be operating in questionable circumstances will be supplied with a second, almost identical uniform incorporating light personal armour. The epaulettes are designed to protect the collarbone from a downward blow, with slash-proof material over resilient core, whilst the jacket provides Protection +2 without appearing any different to a standard suit jacket. The waistcoat is a little more bulky than standard and some users prefer to wear the ordinary one under most circumstances. It is sufficient to provide Protection +4. The jacket and waistcoat together provide Protection +6.

ARMOUR TYPE	PROTECTION	TL	RAD	KG	COST	REQUIRED SKILL
Working Dress	+2	12	0	0	Cr60	None
Full Dress (suit)	+0	12	0	0	Cr1000	None
Full Dress (protected suit)	+2	12	0	0	Cr5000	None
Armoured Waistcoat	+4	12	0	0	Cr900	None
Vacc Suit	+9	12	80	6	Cr25000	Vacc Suit 0

The 'tactical' version of the suit also incorporates provision for a concealed holster for a small handgun, with space for two spare magazines, although this is not usually worn by executives, and a dispenser at the belt for two 'escape grenades'. Typically one flash and one noise grenade are carried. It is unusual to need this sort of security equipment but RVSC has suffered the occasional kidnap attempt on high-ranking personnel and has been known to do business on worlds with rather loose law enforcement. Any management-level personnel visiting a world outside the Imperial border are issued with the tactical version of the company uniform as a matter of course. This includes the Travellers.

For working dress aboard ship, RVSC issues coveralls of slightly above-average quality, bearing the insignia of the company on the sleeves and left breast. These are paired with a fluorescent orange sleeveless jerkin with many pockets and a tool belt. These only vary from the norm in that the jerkin has a 'glow' feature which can be triggered at need and there is an emergency siren and radio beacon built into the tool belt. The company has a very slick employee safety film which is mandatory viewing – more about demonstrating how much the company cares about keeping its people safe than reminding them not to wander away from the ship in a dust storm and to Joachim Krystalfuchs' eternal embarrassment he has a starring role.

The company also provides a vacc suit and expects all mission personnel to use it in preference to their own. This does not matter all that much if they are not observed by outsiders but RVSC wants to maintain a corporate image and get its brand into every mission log and routine surveillance video. The vacc suit is of good quality and entirely suitable for its role but it is a little lighter and easier to move in than a standard TL12 design. This is mainly so that RVSC personnel look good when operating in their suits and comes at the price of reduced armour. The suits are entirely as good as standard ones in terms of environmental protection.

RVSC ISSUE WEAPONS

THE *ABYSS* COLLECTION

RVSC issue weaponry with its own logo. Most weapons are standard, differing only in appearance from those on sale at most starport weapons outlets. However, the firm does make use of some less common weaponry. None of these items are exclusive to RVSC; they are bought in bulk and modified to the company's appearance specifications but are available elsewhere.

SMALL ARMS

The standard handgun used by RVSC is manufactured by The Smallarms Company of Deneb, or SCD. SCD sells primarily to government and corporate clients and operates in the security rather than military sector. Its weaponry is often found aboard starships or in the hands of starport security teams. Some items are also popular with law enforcement agencies, although the Imperial Ministry of Justice trialled and rejected a number of personal weapons a decade ago.

The S8 (for 'Shipboard Eight') is issued as standard for security personnel and as an emergency gun in shipboard lockers. It is built around an 8x20mm cartridge, throwing a relatively small bullet at high velocity. Standard 'ball' rounds claim slightly superior performance to the industry-standard 9x19mm handgun but with a price tag to match. Low-penetration 'security' rounds are also available. These are made from tough but slightly flexible polymer, flattening on impact rather than punching a hole in solid material. This slightly improves knockdown against unarmoured targets but is all but useless against objects and body armour. Security rounds are generally carried aboard ship to avoid endangering critical components and to reduce the danger from ricochets.

The S8 has trigger, grip and magazine safety devices but no manual safety. The weapon can be carried uncocked with a round in the chamber, with no chance

WEAPON	TL	RANGE	DAMAGE	KG	COST	MAGAZINE	MAGAZINE/POWER PACK COST	TRAITS
SCD Shipboard-8 Handgun (Ball)	10	15m	3D-2	0.9	Cr350	18	Cr20	AP 1
SCD Shipboard-8 Handgun (Security)	10	15m	3D-1	0.9	Cr350	18	Cr22	Lo-Pen 4*
SCD Compact-8 Handgun (Ball)	10	10m	3D-2	0.6	Cr375	8	Cr10	AP 1
SCD Compact-8 Handgun (Security)	10	10m	3D-1	0.6	Cr375	8	Cr12	Lo-Pen 4*
Laser Carbine	12	250m	4D+4	3	Cr4500	50	Cr3000	Zero-G
SCD Guardian (Standard Shot)	10	30m	4D-2	2.8	Cr320	3	Cr3	Bulky, Lo-Pen 2*
SCD Guardian (Light Shot)	10	20m	2D+2	2.8	Cr320	3	Cr3	Bulky, Lo-Pen 4*

* The Lo-Pen trait indicates that the weapon has poor penetration against armour or hard surfaces. The target's Protection is multiplied by the number indicated.

of an accidental discharge and brought into action immediately using a double-action trigger pull. After this, function is normal for a semi-automatic pistol. An ambidextrous de-cocking lever lowers the hammer to the safe position. Standard magazines contain 18 rounds, plus one in the chamber.

A smaller version, designated C8 (for 'Compact Eight') is issued to management-level personnel who are going in harm's way and to anyone who might need a concealable weapon such as bodyguards at a formal occasion. The C8 is in no way a 'body pistol' – it is made from standard materials and is simply smaller and slimmer. The C8 can take an S8 magazine but it sticks out the bottom of the magazine well and prevents the weapon from being holstered. An 8-round magazine is more commonly used, which is not compatible with the larger S8.

For more serious situations, the company issues a laser carbine which bears the corporation logo but is otherwise standard. In between the two is a smoothbore longarm designated SCD-Guardian. This is a short shotgun-like weapon with a three-shell magazine under the barrel. It can be carried safely with a shell in the chamber, giving four rapid shots. Chambered for a 14mm shell, the Guardian is light by shotgun standards and can fulfil multiple roles. The semi-automatic action is arguably one of the fastest and smoothest on the market, with a cut-off to allow a shell of a different type to be inserted into the breech. Guardians are normally stowed with the chamber empty to allow the first shot to be tailored to the present need. A folding stock is fitted but can be removed if desired.

'Standard shot' ammunition is used for human-sized targets. It performs poorly against armour but is not likely to ricochet or penetrate control pathways. 'Light shot' is the most common shell actually fired, however. It contains larger numbers of very small pellets, making it ideal for small, fast targets like vermin or to injure rather than kill human-sized opponents.

ESCAPE GRENADES

Escape grenades are small metallic cylinders not unlike certain data storage devices – this resemblance is intentional. Once activated, they are triggered by sharp impact. Striking one or slamming it down on a desk will suffice, although this is inadvisable as the grenade will do 1D damage to anyone holding it when it goes off. More commonly, they are flung against the wall or floor as an executive's bodyguards bundle them away from danger.

There are three types of grenade available; flash, noise and glitter. Flash grenades emit a bright flash which will dazzle anyone not prepared for it. It is not enough to completely blind someone but will cause a flinch and some lingering pain which may slow a response. Unless there is some reason why it is not pure chance – such as someone realising what is about to happen and looking away – roll 2D. On 11–12 the victim was looking right at the flash and suffers DM-6 on all vision-based actions. There is a 50% (1–3 on 1D) chance the penalty is reduced by 1 each round thereafter until it reaches zero. On 5–10, the flash was in the subject's field of view and the DM starts at -2. On 2–4, the target was looking elsewhere or averted their gaze in time and suffers no penalty.

Noise grenades make a huge bang and have a slight concussive effect. Everyone exposed must make an Average (8+) END check, or be stunned for a number of rounds equal to the negative Effect. Anyone expecting the bang gains DM+4 for this check. Regardless of the outcome, anyone without protection (such as ear defenders or a sealed armour suit) suffers DM-2 the following round on all checks. This includes the user's allies but that is often considered acceptable if it buys time for an extraction.

Glitter grenades are more accurately named defensive optical scatter devices but are almost universally referred to as glitter bombs. A tiny bursting charge throws up a cloud of refractory microfragments sufficient to affect a three metre cubed space. The cloud will settle in 2D rounds and can be dispersed quicker by fans or wind. In the meantime it makes any form of optical sighting harder, obscures optical and thermal cameras, and reduces the damage caused by lasers by 2D. DM-2 applies to optical sighting and DM-4 to any form of intense light such as lasers or focused flashlights. The effect is also highly dramatic, creating a fabulous rainbow of ever-changing sparkles. These grenades are misused on a frequent basis, despite dire warnings from the company.

SUPPORT WEAPONS

THE *ABYSS* COLLECTION

The support weapons used by the rebels in the battle for Dinom are either improvised from mining equipment or brought in from offworld. Similar equipment can be encountered on other worlds, with slight local variations.

60mm Rocket-Propelled Grenade

Generally known as an RP-60, this weapon is a standard design used by many planetary armed forces as well as insurgent groups. There are branded and trademarked versions, and crude copies knocked up in cave workshops. The ones on Dinom are somewhere in between; a mix of grenades smuggled in and others made in secret workshops using mining explosives.

The warhead section is cone-shaped, with a pre-fragmented case and a hard penetrator tip. On a direct hit this allows the warhead to punch into light vehicles before detonating, although it performs poorly against armoured vehicles. The warhead is a combination of a shaped charge and fragmentation, as is typical of high-explosive dual-purpose (HEDP) weapons.

Propulsion is by way of a small rocket motor in the base of the warhead section, using offset vents to create spin. The weapon is extremely simple, with no guidance system and no electronics to detect or jam. Effective direct-fire range is 250 metres, although the weapon will travel further. In normal gravity these weapons have a range of around one kilometre, but on a world like Dinom they can be fired in a high arc to come down 10 kilomatres or more away. Accuracy is minimal at this distance, making rocket propelled grenades suitable only for harassing urban areas at random. At 250 metres or less there is a respectable chance of a hit on a moving vehicle even just using a basic optical sight.

60mm RAM Grenade Launcher

The standard launcher for an RP-60 is a reusable tube with a basic optical sight, fed from a rotating two-shot ammunition canister. Canisters can be reused but reloading involves replacing blow-out panels at the rear in a workshop. Swapping a second projectile into place is a Minor Action; replacing a canister is a Major Action.

60mm Bombardment Cluster

The bombardment cluster is a set of four container/launchers positioned at varying angles and attached to the side of a vehicle. Weapons are launched in an arc to impact at a distance pre-set by the angle of the launchers. This is affected by inclined ground, of course, enabling some control over where the projectiles come down. Aiming is accomplished by pointing the whole vehicle, making the process rather imprecise. These weapons are normally set for a 300–500 metre range and suffer DM-6 on attempts to attack a target smaller than a city block. An app is available for download to a vehicle's navigation system which provides an estimated impact point and reduces the DM to -2. There is no legitimate civilian use of this app, making it illegal in most areas and potentially proof of involvement in an insurgency. All projectiles are launched in a single salvo, although a vehicle could have more than one cluster mounted on it.

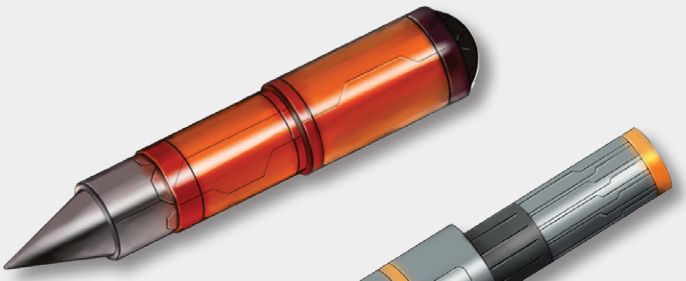
100mm Anti-armour Missile

Typically known as an AT-100, this standard weapon is manufactured on many worlds and is simple enough to throw together in a field workshop providing basic electronics components and explosives are available. It consists of a disposable launcher/container with a basic electronic sight. The latter combines optical and thermal detection in a manner that would be expensive and impressive on a mid-tech world but is dirt cheap at TL10. Once locked onto a target, a process taking 1-3 combat rounds depending on range, movement and visibility, the weapon will self-guide.

These weapons are intended to take out mid-tech armoured vehicles and lighter vehicles of all Tech Levels, including grav craft. However, they can engage spacecraft if they are low enough. DM+2 applies as usual when targeting a space vessel with a ground-based weapon but damage is reduced to a tenth.

Mining Laser

Mining lasers are intended for intense focus at very short distances and are not particularly effective as weapons without modification. By adding additional beam collimation equipment and altering the focus point it is possible to create a weapon with an effective range of up to 500 metres. Focus is rapidly lost beyond this distance. Traverse and elevation mechanisms can be created by altering the mining mount but these devices are intended for blasting rock at a distance of a few metres and are not at all precise when used against anything smaller than a building. Mining lasers do damage on the ground scale and suffer DM-2 to attack rolls.



WEAPON	TL	RANGE	DAMAGE	KG	COST	MAGAZINE	MAGAZINE/ POWERPACK COST	TRAITS
RP-60 Projectile	8	250m	6D	3.2	Cr75	N/A	N/A	AP6, Blast 12
RP-60 Launcher	8	250m	6D	11.2 Loaded	Cr250	2	Cr150	AP6, Blast 12
RP-60 Cluster	8	250m	6D	18	Cr500	N/A	N/A	AP6, Blast 12
AT-100	10	1,000m	10D	16	Cr600	N/A	N/A	AP12, Blast 15, Smart
Converted Mining Laser	9	500m	8D	1500	Cr125000	N/A	N/A	Low-G

10mm Submachinegun

OTHER WEAPONS

THE *ABYSS* COLLECTION

10mm 'Guardian Compact' Submachinegun

The 10mm 'Guardian Compact' submachineguns used by Sir Hamex' bodyguards are a standard design manufactured by Instellarms and a few licensees. Expensive for their type, they are well made but command a high price mainly for their connections with high-end security. Layout is conventional, with a magazine inserted through the handgrip. Usually a 12-round carry magazine is used, allowing the weapon to be holstered like a handgun. Users typically carry a spare 12-round magazine and two 26-round extension magazines which project from the bottom of the weapon. First shot is double-action, after which conventional semi-automatic or full-automatic fire continues. The usual ammunition choice is designed for maximum stopping power rather than penetration and to avoid ricochets. When operating in a more open environment, standard ball rounds are commonly used.

Assault Carbines

Assault Carbines

The assault carbines issued to the Dinom security service are a shorter and lighter version of a standard weapon produced on many worlds. Chambered for a 5x40mm round, these are bullpup configuration weapons loaded through the fixed stock from a detachable magazine. With a shortened barrel and a vertical foregrip they are well suited to operations in urban terrain.

Laser Weapon

The laser weapon in an attaché case used by Arlent Streen's bodyguard is a common security device. The handle of the case has a catch which releases the weapon and at the same time deploys light armour panels which fold out under their own weight. The result is a personal shield which can be held up by the handle, covering a 40x100 centimetre rectangle. The shield is awkward to use and not much use against melee attacks but it will get in the way of bullets and provide some protection. This can vary and should be determined by 1D+2 each time the shield is hit. The laser weapon is an oversized pistol with a large-capacity powerpack. Similar guns are available without the case; those bought without the case cost Cr4500.

Laser Weapon

WEAPON	TL	RANGE	DAMAGE	KG	COST	MAGAZINE	MAGAZINE/ POWERPACK COST	TRAITS
Guardian Compact Submachinegun	12	20m	3D-1	1.6	Cr750	12 or 26	Cr10 or 20	Auto 3, Lo-Pen 2
5mm Assault Carbine	10	150m	3D-1	3.2	Cr450	34	Cr18	Auto 2
Security Laser	12	40m	3D+4	2.5	Cr3500	200	Cr5000	Zero-G

EMERGENCY VACUUM PROTECTION EQUIPMENT

THE *ABYSS* COLLECTION

Starships, along with transportation systems and structures built in hostile environments such as airless worlds, are required to carry an adequate quantity of protective equipment. The simplest of these are survival shelters, otherwise known as depressurisation refuges, emergency blisters and a variety of other terms. A survival shelter is fixed in place, inflating to create a hemispherical refuge which will usually be fed from the vessel or building's life support system if it is functional and from bottled air if not. Zips are used to allow access and are not completely airtight but will suffice for a short time. Most blisters have small second chamber that can be used as an airlock by rescue personnel.

Rescue balls are designed to inflate into a complete sphere, remaining tethered to their deployment point until deliberately detached. They are spherical and can be propelled by a person inside walking 'up' the side in the desired direction. The user can pick up objects or manipulate tools and controls using a glove/sleeve which covers the forearm.

Softsuits are short-term temporary vacc suits, with a soft transparent helmet and an air bottle on a belt clip. Another pocket contains a rather basic multitool and a set of chemical lightsticks. Softsuits are rather flimsy and come in what is described as 'one size fits nobody', with adjustable panels. They can accommodate most humanoids but vessels intended for other body types may not have enough of them. A softsuit is intended for survival, allowing the user to get to a safe area or be rescued. They are not suitable for long-term use and provide no protection against damage or radiation.

ITEM	TL	KG	COST
Survival Shelter	9	6	Cr100
Rescue Ball	9	0.5	Cr225

ARMOUR TYPE	PROTECTION	TL	RAD	KG	COST	REQUIRED SKILL
Softsuit	+0	9	0	—	Cr400	Vacc Suit-0

STARSHIPS

Two starship designs feature in this mini-campaign, both produced by General Products.

DECKPLAN LEGEND:

DOOR

IRIS VALVE

AIRLOCK

LIFT

IRIS VALVE UP

IRIS VALVE DOWN

IRIS VALVE UP/DOWN

G/CHAIR

COMMON AREA

FRESHER

SHIP'S LOCKER

LOW BERTH

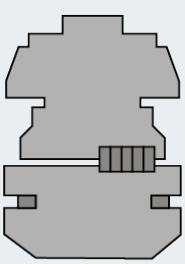
DRONES

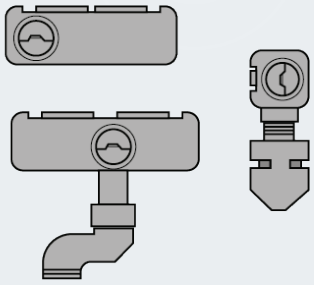
STATEROOM BEDS

AIR/RAFT

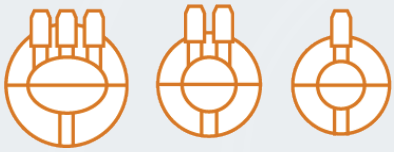
CARGO BAY

CARGO CRANE

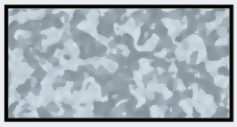




POWER PLANT/JUMP DRIVE/ MANOEUVRE DRIVE/MACHINERY


TURRETS

HULL


FUEL

Manufactured by General Products, the *Argacan* is a new market entry which has thus far found little favour. The general concept is good enough but General has of late suffered a number of blows to its reputation in the shipbuilding sector. The most notorious of these is the Kinunir 'vanguard cruiser', essentially a large escort or small patrol ship but hyped as the answer to all manner of security problems. General Products has a reputation for adequacy which it sought to throw off with ambitious projects like the Kinunir. After this failure, the firm has returned to its roots and is trying to bring to market a range of inexpensive but reliable craft and vessels. The *Argacan* is among them.

Conceived as a multipurpose naval auxiliary which can carry out light patrol work or even act as an escort for civilian traffic, the *Argacan* tried to be all things to everyone at a budget price. It is not especially cheap for a rugged 600-ton vessel but represents good value as an investment for a client who might need to swap ships from commercial to security work or who prefers not to have to assign escorts to vulnerable auxiliaries. Target clients of course included the Imperial Navy, since that is where the big budget Credits are found but thus far sales have been limited to planetary governments and the occasional shipping line that perceives a need for such a vessel.

The *Argacan* is designed for efficiency of cargo space rather than appearance or elegance of function. Fuel tankage and cargo occupy the lower deck, which is roughly rectangular. Above, it has a smaller and narrower upper deck, widening aft to house the power and drive systems and in the centre where the accommodation block is located. The bridge and command spaces slightly overhang the forward end of the lower deck, with a glazed downward-looking section to allow the cargo chief to direct loading operations by direct observation.

As standard, the *Argacan* is armed for strong self-defence. Two turrets are carried atop the upper deck, with one more at each corner of the lower deck, all remotely controlled from a gunnery chamber just aft of the bridge. As standard, the dorsal turrets mount an all-laser armament, with a sandcaster/beam laser armament aft and a missile/laser mix forward. Beam lasers are considered to be defensive weapons, allowing these turrets to switch from sand or missile operations to close-in defence against missiles and small craft.

Crew complement can vary and some operators prefer to take delivery without armament. As standard, the vessel operates with a commanding officer who also serves as either the astrogator or chief engineer, plus a mix of specialist and multiskilled crewmembers. A total of four engineering crew are required, including three qualified as engineers and one to perform 'light' technical or maintenance tasks. This requirement can be fulfilled by multiskilled personnel with other duties so long as there are enough people to get the job done and a total of three levels of the Engineer skill are present aboard.

A typical crew includes a pilot and two other bridge-qualified personnel, which may include the commanding officer, a chief engineer and sufficient other personnel to perform necessary duties, with some multiskilled crew who have Gunner skill if weapons are carried. Standard complement is six to eight without weapons and eight to ten if weapons are carried.

Performance is above the level of the typical trader, which comes at the price of increased cost and reduced cargo capacity. Some users will never need the light hull armour or the weaponry but these allow the *Argacan* to appeal to a wider target audience. The cargo bay can be configured into a small barracks or vehicle transport garage, making this a useful ship for a world government wanting to project power or a mercenary unit needing low-cost transport. Starmerc units specialising in raiding might also favour this vessel. As yet, it is in service with only a few clients but General Products is convinced it has a winner in the *Argacan* and is offering vessels on a generous mortgage scheme to help popularise it.

MULTIPURPOSE VESSEL

CLASS: ARGACAN

TL14		Tons	Cost (MCr)
Hull	600 tons, Standard	—	30
Armour	Bonded Superdense, Armour: 3	14.4	7.2
M-Drive	Thrust 2	12	24
J-Drive	Jump 2	35	52.5
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 450	30	30
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 8 weeks of operation	126	—
Bridge		20	3
Computer	Computer/30	—	20
Sensors	Military Grade	2	4.1
Weapons	Triple Turrets (missile racks, beam laser) x2	2	6
	Triple Turrets (sandcasters, beam laser) x2	2	4
	Triple Turrets (pulse lasers) x2	2	8
Ammunition	Sandcaster Canister Storage (20 canisters) x2	2	—
	Missile Storage (24 missiles) x2	4	—
Systems	Fuel Processor (60 tons/day)	3	0.15
	Loading Belt (TL12)	1	0.01
	Repair Drones	6	1.2
	Armouries x4	4	1
	Medical Bay	4	2
	UNREP System (60 tons)	3	1.5
Staterooms	Standard x12	48	6
Common Areas		24	2.4
Software	Manoeuvre	—	—
	Jump Control/2	—	0.2
	Library	—	—
	Intellect	—	—
Cargo		255	—

Crew

Varies

Hull: 240

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

Cr16938/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr203.26

Power Requirements

Basic Ship Systems
120

Manoeuvre Drive
120

Jump Drive
120

Sensors
2

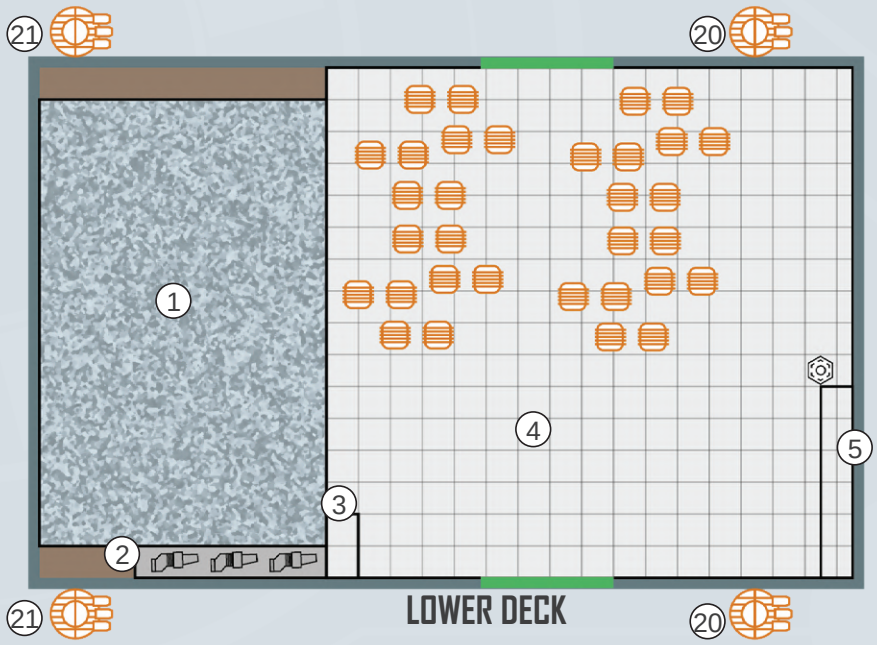
Weapons
46

Fuel Processor
3

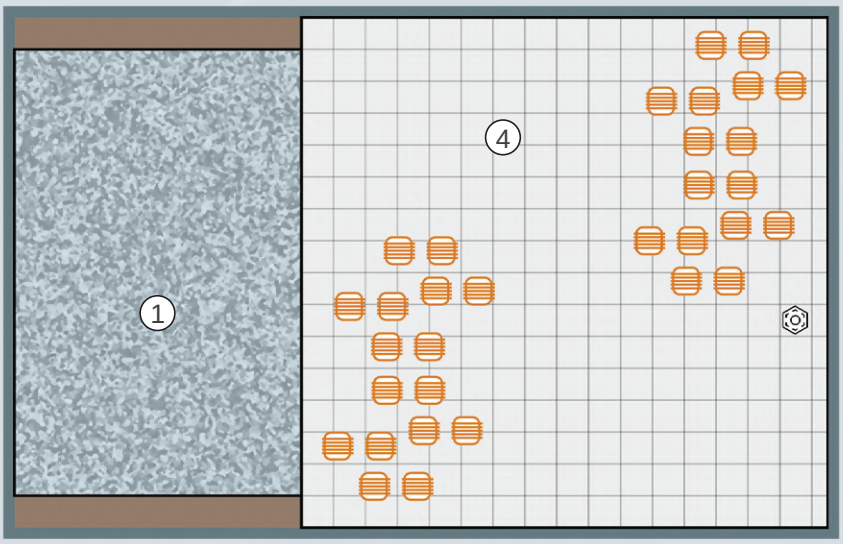
Systems
5

ARGACAN MULTIPURPOSE VESSEL

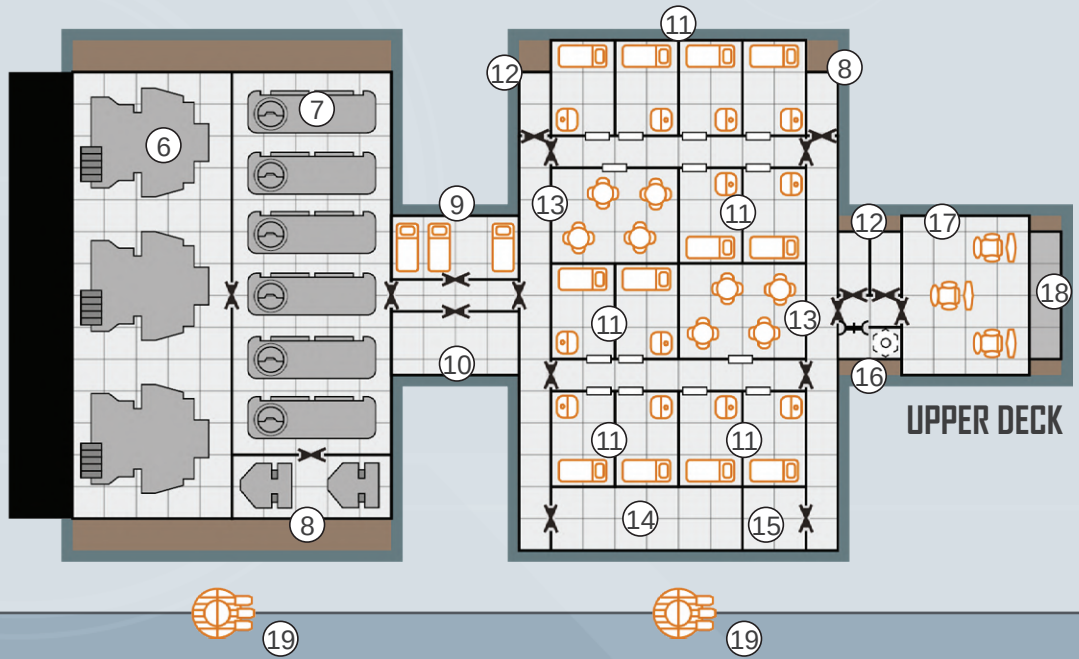
1 square = 0.5 Ton



LOWER DECK



MIDDLE DECK



UPPER DECK

1. Fuel (two decks high)
2. Fuel processor
3. Loading belt
4. Cargo hold (2 decks high)
5. UNREP system
6. Jump drive
7. Power plant
8. Manoeuvre drive
9. Medical bay
10. Missile Storage
11. Stateroom
12. Armoury
13. Common Area
14. Drones
15. Sandcaster Barrel Storage
16. Airlock
17. Bridge (2 decks high)
18. Sensors
19. Triple turrets (missile racks, beam laser)
20. Triple turrets (sandcasters, beam laser)
21. Triple turrets (pulse lasers)

IMPROVED KINUNIR PATROL DESTROYER

TYPE: —

The original Kinunir vanguard cruiser was a major disappointment both for its designers and its operators. Only 20 were ever buil and about a quarter of those are already out of service. General Products, in particular, staked a lot on the class and lost heavily both in financial terms and in prestige. The Improved Kinunir is an attempt to salvage something from the debacle by reworking the design and making use of the streamlined plan originally set up to mass-produce the class.

General hull form is near-identical to the original design, using a flattened cone shape. Layout is generally conventional, with drives aft and control spaces forward. A pinnace is carried for liaison work and personnel transfers. However, there are some major differences between the Improved Kinunir and its predecessor; the requirement to carry a platoon of marines, imposed late in development upon the original and the cause of many troubles, has been deleted and the space repurposed. The Improved Kinunir is intended to carry a squad of marines for shipboard security and boarding parties but is no longer billed as capable of putting down insurrections. Instead, the Improved Kinunir is what the design was originally intended to be; a patrol and escort vessel.

The Improved Kinunir is slightly larger than the Chrysanthemum escort destroyer and has the same level of strategic mobility – jump-4. However, it cannot keep pace in normal space with fleet elements and is not intended to, as 4G acceleration is entirely enough for security work, saving greatly on costs and fuel requirements. The Improved Kinunir is not intended to operate with the sector fleet; instead it is aimed at the subsector fleet and individual world governments that wish to contribute to local security.

Primary armament consists of two particle accelerator barbettes located to fire in a forward arc. These are more than sufficient to outgun a typical pirate or small raider, and are backed up by two missile turrets. A battery of eight laser turrets is mounted along the sides of the central fin and primarily intended for defensive fire. In the escort role an Improved Kinunir can engage missiles or small craft heading for its charges; the pattern of four turrets each side of the fin ensures that only half the complement can engage a given target at once but provides good all-round protection against the sort of relatively minor threats this vessel is intended to deal with.

One of the more controversial alterations from the original design is the addition of a thin layer of bonded superdense armour. Critics of the design have suggested that more armour or none at all would be better options. However, the level of protection fitted was the most that could be added without a redesign and provides sufficient protection to defeat or at least mitigate hits from light weapons. The Improved Kinunir is not intended to fight cruisers or fleet destroyers; it is a long-range patrol asset whose likely opponents are pirate vessels.

The Improved Kinunir nominally requires a crew of 50, plus a marine contingent. Usually a squad of eight is carried, led by either a senior sergeant or a second lieutenant. The marines are usually cross-trained to be able to take over some shipboard tasks including maintenance, damage control and gunnery, which allows ships to run with a slightly lower crew complement.

Other interstellar states might term this vessel a frigate but the Imperial Navy does not currently use that designation. Although unlikely to be adopted for use by a sector fleet, the Improved Kinunir is intended to be attractive to the navy as a security platform and thus complies with Imperial Navy designation practice. At the present time this vessel is offered to a variety of clients and has gone into low-volume production but the Imperial Navy has not made a decision about adoption.

IMPROVED KINUNIR PATROL DESTROYER

TYPE: —

TL15		Tons	Cost (MCr)
Hull	1,250 tons, Standard	—	62.5
	Reinforced	—	31.25
Armour	Bonded Superdense, Armour: 2	20	10
M-Drive	Thrust 4 (size reduction x2)	40	125
J-Drive	Jump 4 (size reduction x2)	104	243.75
Power Plant	Fusion (TL15), Power 1400	70	140
Fuel Tanks	J-4, 8 weeks of operation	514	—
Bridge	Holographic Controls	40	7.813
Computer	Computer/35	—	30
Sensors	Advanced	5	5.3
Weapons	Particle Barbettes x2	10	16
	Triple Turrets (missile racks) x2	2	6.5
	Double Turrets (beam lasers) x8	8	12
Ammunition	Missile Storage (120 missiles)	10	—
Screens	Nuclear Dampers x5	50	50
Craft	Docking Space (40 tons)	44	11
	Pinnace	—	8.712
Systems	Fuel Scoops	—	1
	Workshop	6	0.9
	Medical Bay	4	2
	Briefing Room	4	0.5
	Armoury	9	2.25
	Fuel Processor (100 tons/day)	5	0.25
Staterooms	Standard x30	120	15
	Barracks (capacity 10)	10	0.5
Common Areas		46	4.6
Software	Manoeuvre	—	—
	Evade/2	—	2
	Fire Control/4	—	8
	Jump Control/4	—	0.4
	Library	—	—
	Intellect	—	—
Cargo		129	—

Crew

Captain, Pilots x3, Astrogator, Engineers x7, Maintenance x3, Medic, Gunners x34, Administrators x2, Officers x4, Marines x8

Hull: 550

Running Costs

MAINTENANCE COST

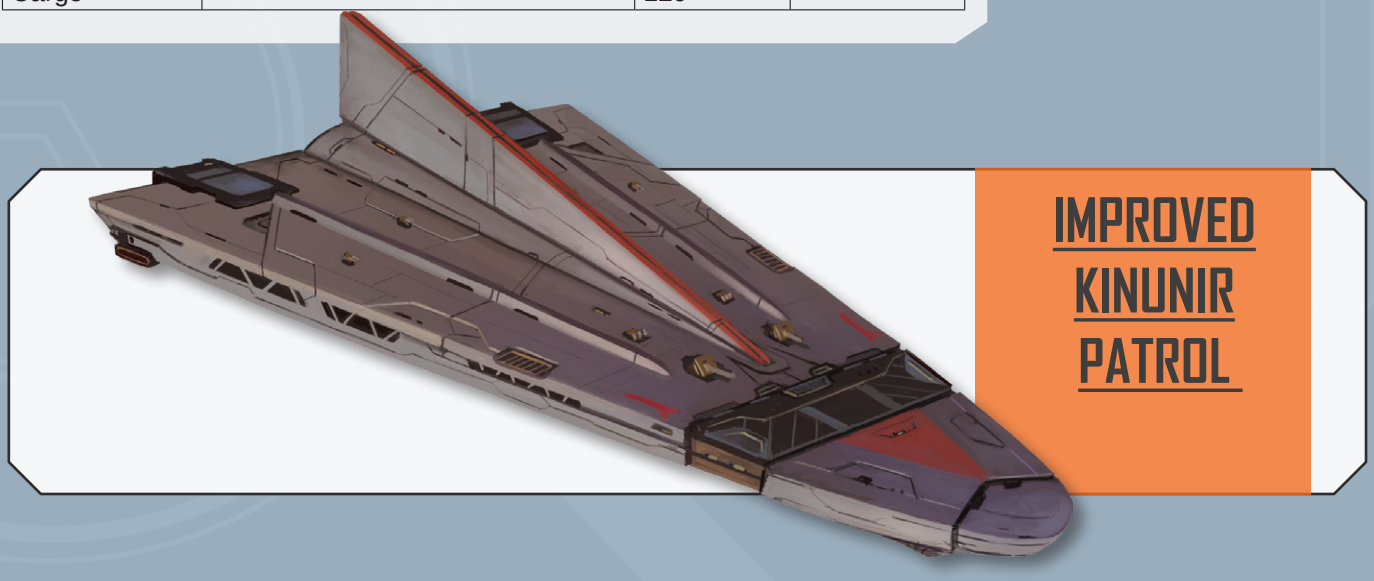
Cr66435/month

PURCHASE COST

MCr797.225

Power Requirements

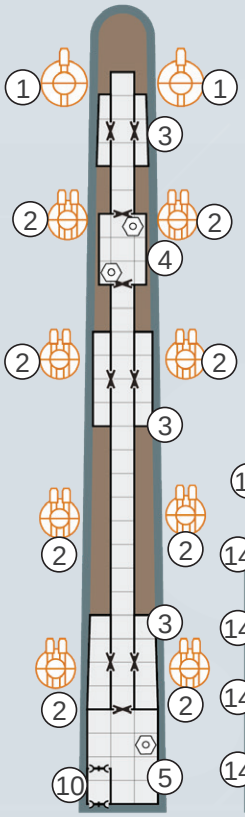
Basic Ship Systems	250
Manoeuvre Drive	500
Jump Drive	500
Sensors	6
Weapons	104
Fuel Processor	5
Systems	5



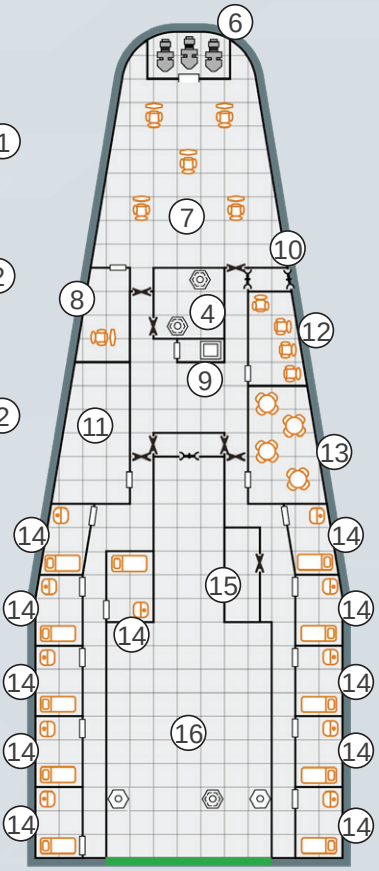
IMPROVED KINUNIR PATROL

1 square = 0.5 Ton

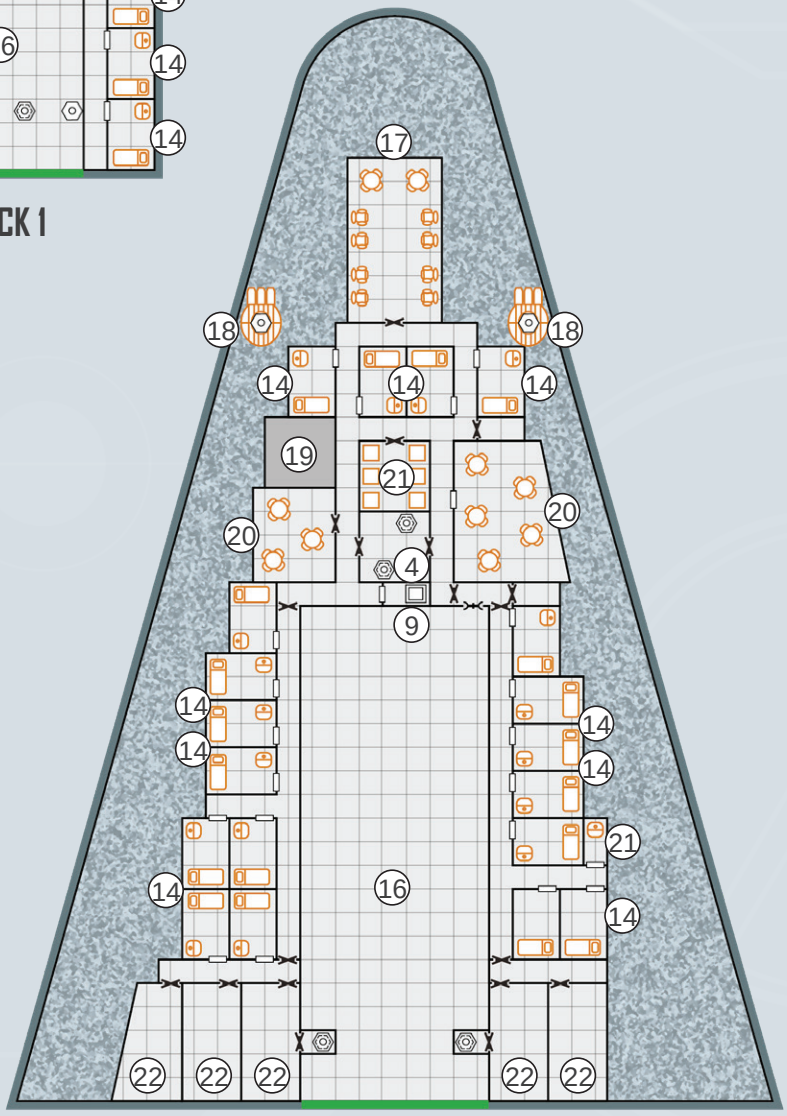
1. Particle barbettes
2. Double turrets (beam lasers)
3. Storage area
4. Access chamber
5. EVA room
6. Sensors
7. Bridge
8. Office
9. Lift
10. Airlock
11. Ward room
12. Briefing room
13. Common area
14. Stateroom
15. Armoury
16. Docking space
17. Recreation room
18. Triple turrets (missile racks)
19. Fuel processor
20. Common area
21. Galley storage
22. Nuclear damper



Q DECK



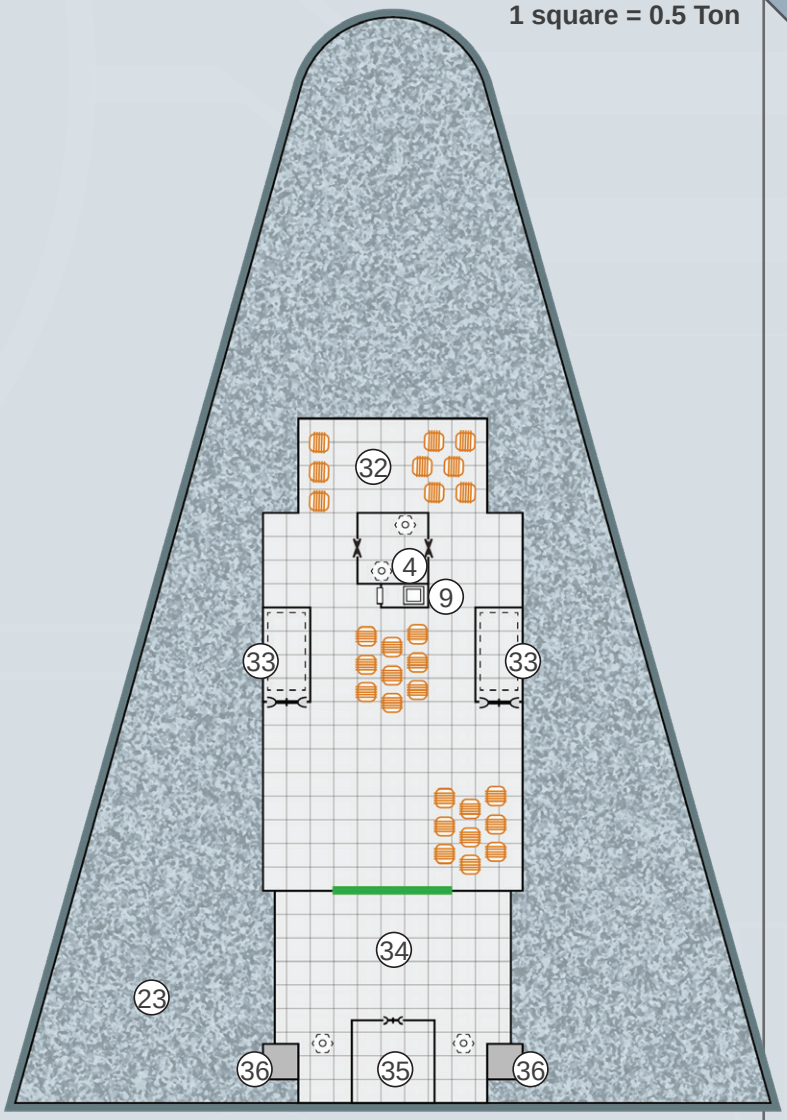
DECK 1



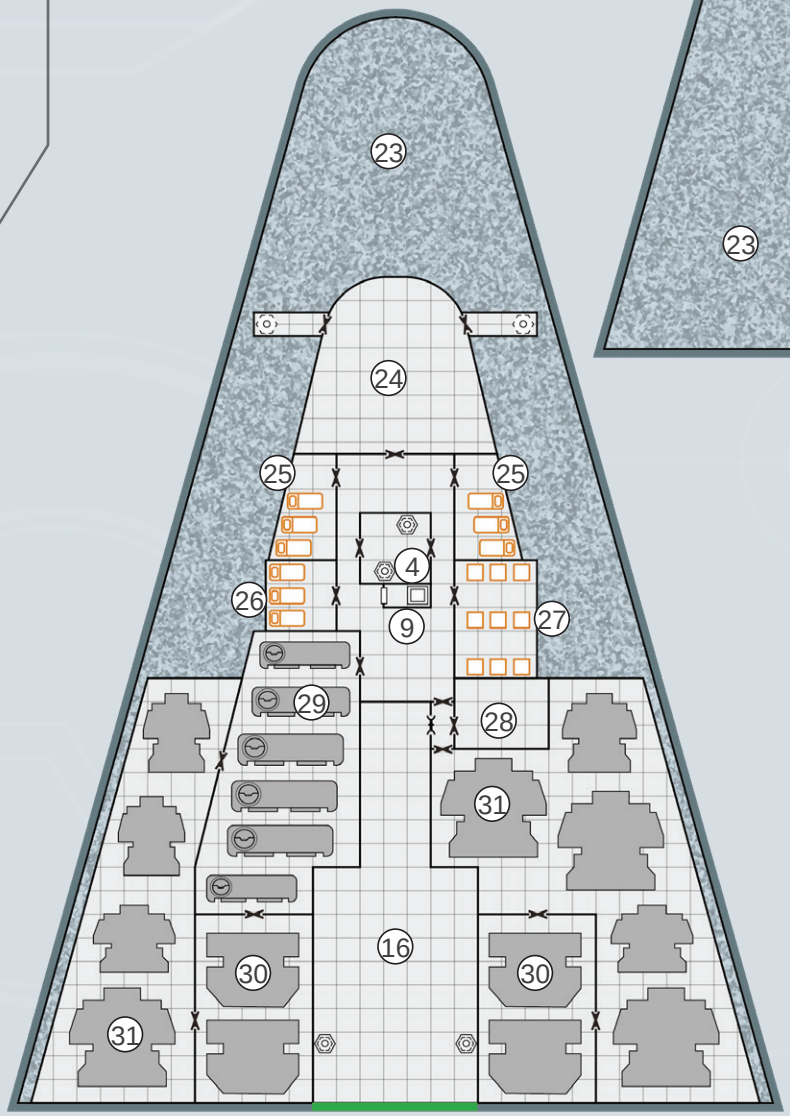
DECK 2

1 square = 0.5 Ton

1. Particle barbettes
2. Double turrets (beam lasers)
3. Storage area
4. Access chamber
5. EVA room
6. Sensors
7. Bridge
8. Office
9. Lift
10. Airlock
11. Ward room
12. Briefing room
13. Common area
14. Stateroom
15. Armoury
16. Docking space
17. Recreation room
18. Triple turrets (missile racks)
19. Fuel processor
20. Common area
21. Galley storage
22. Nuclear damper



DECK 4



DECK 3

23. Fuel
24. Missile storage
25. Barracks
26. Medical bay
27. Galley storage
28. Armoury
29. Power plant
30. Manoeuvre drive
31. Jump drive
32. Forward cargo hold
33. Loading ramp
34. Cargo/configurable space
35. Workshop
36. Fuel scoop machinery

LIBRARY DATA

The following information is readily available at most data terminals, although the exact wording may vary if there are local considerations such as bias against certain nobles, governments or business groups. Library data represents what is commonly known, not the whole truth. Some entries are entirely false, although this is rare. Such data tends to get weeded out by routine fact-checking, although there are some persistent myths and falsehoods that just will not go away.

ABYSS RIFT

The so-called Abyss Rift lies within the Lanth subsector, although some claim it extends into neighbouring Vilis. It is a small region of extremely low stellar density with a reputation for starship disappearances and misjumps. There have been reports of radio signals received whilst in jump – which is thought to be impossible – and even of 'someone or something on the hull, trying to get in'. Some of these reports have come from reliable witnesses but most seem to be variants on old spacers' tales whose origins probably lie in the bottom of a bottle.

There are seven worlds within the Abyss Rift, of which three are Red Zoned. Reasons for interdiction are rarely given, so there is nothing out of the ordinary in the lack of available information. Despite this, the usual conspiracy theorists make much of the fact that there are multiple Red and Amber Zones in the rift. The fact that the centre of the rift seems to lie in Lanth 1917, between the interdicted worlds of Ylaven and Victoria, suggests to many that there is something very unusual in the area.

ARGACAN MULTIPURPOSE VESSEL

Manufactured by General Products, the Argacan is a new market entry. It is a multipurpose transport vessel capable of acting as a naval auxiliary, carrying out light patrol work or even acting as an escort for civilian traffic. It is obviously aimed at governmental clients and as with all such ships, the Imperial Navy or perhaps the Imperial Marines is the ideal target. Thus far sales have been low but it is believed that large numbers have already been put into production in anticipation of orders.

DENISOV BATTLECRUISER

The Denisov-class is the pride of the Sword Worlds fleets, and the most prestigious command available. It is not the largest or most heavily armed vessel available, nor is it a dedicated command cruiser even although it has command facilities. However, its dashing reputation and the possibility of being turned loose to conduct a spectacular raiding cruise makes the Denisov the most desirable posting an officer could wish for.

The Denisovs were designed as highly mobile super-cruisers rather than true capital ships, capable of undertaking devastating raiding cruises into enemy territory. Layout is conventional for Sword Worlds ships, with a central hull in the shape of a blocky cylinder and two cylindrical outriggers containing additional systems. The class uses a dispersed power generation system to increase survivability and has sufficient fuel to jump a total of four parsecs, although its drives can only manage jump-3. This is in keeping with the intended role as a raider.

FEDERATION OF ARDEN

The 'Federation of Arden' may or may not be a political entity, depending on who is consulted on the subject. Its basis is in a complex history beginning with colonisation of Arden and nearby worlds during the Long Night. There are records of what might be termed a pocket empire centred on Arden but these are questionable as they exist only on Arden itself. It is probable that the colonised worlds remained in contact using their colony ships but entered a technological decline resulting in the loss of starflight capability later in the Long Night.

The population of these worlds lost touch with their Vilani heritage over the centuries and are recorded as being 'neo-barbarians' by the first explorers from the Third Imperium to discover them. That term can have many meanings and does not necessarily indicate low technology or a lack of civilised values. Settlers from the expanding Imperium are known to have reached Arden around 290, although details on how well they were integrated are sketchy. Arden joined the Imperium after the First Frontier War but became independent after the Third.

Ever since independence, in 986, Arden has been reinventing itself in two ways. It promotes its port as a neutral location for contact between the Imperium and the Zhodani Consulate. Some of this is official but more commonly Arden acts as a back-channels conduit for diplomacy and a host for contact at a lower level. This typically means cross-border trade, not all of it of a legal nature.

The other reinvention is as the head of the 'Federation of Arden' whose existence is debatable. It is not officially recognised by the Imperium, the Consulate, nor most of the governments Arden claims are members and indeed the nature of the Federation seems to change depending on the current agenda. At present the Federation is presented as a framework of trade agreements and assistance treaties with no political requirements, although Arden likes to present the Federation as a political bloc when it thinks it can get away with the statement.

It may be that the Federation of Arden remains a political fiction but it is unofficially recognised by some business groups and shipping lines. Arden has manoeuvred itself into a position where it can negotiate on behalf of 'Federation members' who are given incentives not to dispute the arrangement. This is costing Arden a great deal of money but seems to be working. Each new client that recognises Arden as the first among equals in its little corner of space is a step towards the creation of a formal polity.

One policy currently being pursued is the acquisition of starships. These include low-cost patrol ships to increase security and create the impression of a political union that can defend itself. Most, however, are trade vessels which are mostly assigned to regular runs among 'Federation member' worlds or to special projects. There is big money on offer by the standards of independent shipbuilders. The Imperial megacorporations have not been so keen – Arden is small fry by their standards and does not appear to favour suppliers with close ties to any of the major powers.

FORTRESS RHYLANOR

Fortress Rhylanor is one of several 'Fortress' projects proudly declared by the Imperial Navy since the end of the Fourth Frontier War. Others include Fortress Efate, Fortress Lanth and Fortress Regina. As part of a move towards an 'elastic defence' doctrine, the navy designated certain worlds as

forward bases or fortresses. These would serve as a breakwater even if the Imperial Navy was driven back from the systems around them.

The Fortress project includes navy subsidies to expand system defences with orbital forts, ground-based defensive systems and additional non-jump-capable craft. These are to be backed up by a deployment of battle riders from the sector fleet's reserves to create a defence force capable of withstanding a major attack until relieved. Variously portrayed as a set of secure forward bases from which to punish the Zhodani for invading and a group of fortified islands amid a sea of invaders, with naval forces lunging out to clear one system then another, the Fortress worlds are portrayed as the keystones of the defence plan.

Critics of the project claim that it is a return to the 'thin hard crust' strategy, which proved unsatisfactory in the past, and that the defences are either too weak or too strong. Those who think they are too weak suggest that the navy is setting itself up to be defeated in detail trying to rescue the Fortress worlds, which will be necessary for strategic and political reasons. The navy may find itself driven to make advances simply to avoid losing face when its much-vaunted Fortress project turns out to be a paper armadillo.

Others say that far too much budget money is being spent on fortifying worlds that will never be attacked. Meanwhile, they say, the interior of the sector is vulnerable to raids and rebellions. The fleet should be protecting everyone, not a handful of worlds on what is now a peaceful frontier. The Zhodani Consulate can be kept friendly by trade and diplomacy but the same cannot be said for internal threats such as the rabid Ine Givar movement. Instead of endlessly training to support the Fortress worlds the navy should be reminding dissenters that it stands ready to put down any revolt.

GENERAL PROCUREMENT LIC

Despite similarities in name, General Procurement LIC is not part of the megacorporation General Products. It is a privately owned procurement and disposal company specialising in obtaining starship components or whole ships for a range of clients and of disposing of surplus ships and equipment. Disposal in this context can mean destruction or scrapping but more commonly General Procurement acts as a conduit to sell off surplus equipment and vessels. The firm has a contract with the Spinward Marches fleet to dispose of surplus items at the best price it can get, recovering a little of the fleet's budget at the end of a vessel's service life. There are strict rules about what such a private concern can handle; warships are stripped of sensitive systems before being handed over.

GENERAL PRODUCTS

General Products is an Imperial megacorporation specialising in starship construction and heavy industry. It is known for low-cost bulk production rather than the quality of its systems but overall has a good reputation in the marketplace. This has been dented in the starship sector by a number of underperforming designs. Most notorious of those was the Kinunir-class vanguard cruiser whose production run was curtailed after only 20 were built. Serious flaws in the design emerged during operational use, although the class did still manage to provide good service.

At present, General Products is pushing heavily in the Spinward Marches in the hope of reclaiming lost market share. In addition to new and upgraded starship construction yards, notably at Jae Tellona, the firm has taken on contracts to provide heavy industrial machinery on several worlds. The terms of such agreements are kept confidential but there are claims that General Products are loss-leading in order to achieve a better position in the local market. This is not uncommon, although the scale is noteworthy.

INE GIVAR

The Ine Givar is often described as a terrorist organisation, though it was not always such. There is a tendency to apply the 'terrorist' label rather loosely in the hope of discrediting a target. In the case of the Ine Givar, its original intentions appear to have been relatively 'clean' and some segments of the organisation are opposed to the use of terrorist methods either on moral grounds or because they are deemed counterproductive in the long run.

Like many such groups, the Ine Givar was formed from various like-minded movements, all of which were opposed to the Imperial system. Concentration of wealth and power in a small class of nobles and megacorporations – the two are intertwined in Imperial society – is seen as a major injustice by most members. Some are associated with the Ine Givar for other reasons, such as revenge for some past action, and it may be that these were the driving force in escalating the organisation's level of violence.

Officially, the Ine Givar is a peaceful organisation promoting a move towards greater democracy and social equality but most of the members who are true to this ideal have dissociated themselves. What is left is a rather nasty insurgency movement dedicated to bringing about the collapse of the Third Imperium by any means necessary. The Ine Givar quietly sponsors and feeds weaponry to groups that would not choose to be associated if they knew where the support was coming from – anyone with a grievance against the Imperium will be supported whether openly or covertly.

Most Ine Givar chapters believe that the ends justify the means and are willing to engage in terrorism but some seem to relish it more than others. The majority of actions are still 'clean', taking the form of insurgency against military targets rather than terrorist attacks on civilians. Other means are also routinely used; industrial disruption from strikes or slowdowns, bribery, coercion and extortion. This is a factor that makes the Ine Givar more dangerous than most insurgent organisations as it is adept at many forms of attack against the fabric of the Imperium. It has been suggested that the Ine Givar is a front for Zhodani activities, but it is more likely that it is an entirely separate organisation but willing to accept help from anywhere.

KINUNIR VANGUARD CRUISER

The Kinunir was the subject of major controversy from the start. Allegations of favouritism and outright corruption were never proven, but the procurement process that led to orders being placed was certainly controversial. Large orders were placed with several shipyards, though the bulk of construction was to be carried out by General Products, which was heavily involved in the design of the vessel.

The basic concept of the Kinunir was sound, although compromises and design changes along the way weakened it in some areas whilst giving it capabilities it did not need in its primary role. Although rather vaingloriously dubbed a vanguard cruiser or even a battle cruiser, the Kinunir was an escort or perhaps a light destroyer. With a primary armament of two particle accelerators backed up by lasers and a small missile capability, the class is capable of dealing with the average pirate vessel with ease, and could in all probability defeat a group of corvettes whilst retaining combat effectiveness.

During the development process new requirements emerged. The small marine contingent originally intended for boarding parties grew to a whole platoon with meteoric assault capability. This was advertised as enabling a Kinunir to act as a 'fire brigade' dealing with unrest or insurgency, although the small numbers of troops aboard would be of limited use in a major incident. A Kinunir would be able to bring rapid assistance to bear on a threatened noble's estate or embassy, or to deploy troops to cover an evacuation of such a facility. The marines had their uses but the capability offered did not live up to the hype.

Other changes were more significant. According to rumour, the Kinunir was used as a testbed for several experimental systems. A new missile autoloader was among them, although most vessels received a standard system instead. Unconfirmed reports claim some vessels had an advanced artificial intelligence system aboard or some kind of experimental shield generator. The Imperial Navy will neither confirm nor deny such rumours.

The name-ship of the class was laid down by General Products after two other vessels – *Shulgi* and *Zaggisi* – were put into production by competitors. General Products was able to record flight three days ahead of these ships by rushing Kinunir to completion. The loss of the vessel under mysterious circumstances in 1088 resulted in accusations of cutting corners, to the severe detriment of General Products' reputation in the starship construction sector.

In addition to *Kinunir*, four other members of the class are no longer in service. *Allamu* and *Ninkur Sagga* were both lost in the Battle of Two Suns, a major action of the Fourth Frontier War. *Gaesh* proved unsatisfactory during trials and was paid off to become a prison hulk and *Shuruppak* was transferred to the Vegan Autonomous District. It is not clear if this vessel was satisfactory or not. In addition, *Adda Dubsar* never entered service. The half-built hulk was scrapped on the ways after production was curtailed. Fifteen vessels of the class remain in service with the Imperial Navy.

MAGNETODYNAMICS

MagnetoDynamics is a mining and mineral extraction corporation. It was established in 1040 with the goal of implementing newly patented techniques for the extraction of resources from atmospheric and oceanic suspension. The world of Fulacin was

deemed ideal for this kind of exploitation and was leased to MagnetoDynamics in return for expansion of the starport.

The project has overall been a success, although not without some difficulties. Extraction proved viable but the cost of expanding the port absorbed much of the company's profits until the outbreak of the Fourth Frontier War in 1082. Economic conditions after the war were difficult, causing a suspension of operations until new investors came forward in 1089. Since this time MagnetoDynamics has profited both from mineral extraction and commerce at the starport, opening up additional facilities on the planetary surface. The firm has expressed an interest in moving into asteroid mining using an unspecified new technique.

REIDD-VALAASII STARSHIP CORPORATION

RVSC is a business group with its headquarters at Deneb, in the sector of that name. Incorporated in 861, it claims descent from several older starship manufacturing yards which operated independently in niche markets during the previous centuries. RVSC today specialises in repurposed and modified vessels, although much of its revenue comes from refurbishing and refitting standard designs. The company does not custom-build vessels, however it will outfit a standard ship to the user's specifications. The usual practice in this case is to buy in the vessel at the 'ready for fitting-out' stage, have them delivered to an RVSC yard for completion.

RHYLANOR FREIGHT SERVICES LIC

Rhylanor Freight Services is a Limited Imperial Company operating a mix of jump-1 and jump-2 vessels out of Jae Tellona. Jump-1 ships maintain a regular service to Rhylanor, where the company was incorporated, by way of Porozlo. Most of these ships are Type R subsidised merchants. Jump-2 services are operated to Belizo, Celepina and Fulacin using mostly far trader-type vessels. This operation is what would usually be termed a 'feeder service' and is reliant on high volumes of traffic at the interface points on the Spinward Main.

SILENT OBSERVER

Silent Observer is a privately owned infobrokerage, whose publicity materials claim it has access to information sources nobody else can get close to. Whether or not this is true, Silent Observer does a brisk business in data from shipping records to ancient history. Everything offered in its constantly-updated catalogue is entirely legal but often hard to find or helpfully collated. A small membership fee gives access to 'top layer' data in the manner of an encyclopaedia, with in-depth information on any subject available for a fee. It is rumoured that there are additional layers of membership and that there are state secrets or pieces of scandalous information on public figures available to those who have worked their way up the membership hierarchy. This may simply be a clever marketing gambit to keep customers paying.

SHORTHOP SHIPPING LIC

ShortHop Shipping has its head office at Mora. It operates a fleet of small jump-2 vessels, many of them converted scout/couriers. ShortHop has a few dedicated routes, some of them on contract to the Imperial authorities to maintain communications to otherwise isolated systems. However, most of its vessels operate on an ad-hoc basis from Rhylanor, Mora and Lunion. Contracts are typically one-off courier or personnel transport missions for a variety of clients.

AFTERWORD

Whispers on the Abyss is a standalone mini-campaign but it is far more than that. The Abyss referenced in the title could be assumed to be the Abyss Rift which spans the Lanth and Vilis subsectors, but there is another possible meaning.

That abyss is the spectre of all-out war between the Zhodani Consulate and the Third Imperium. That war has begun.

The great fleets are in motion and the Consulate has the initiative. Its forces can strike wherever they wish and the Imperial Navy can only react. It is likely the Zhodani will be able to run wild for at least a few weeks or months before a coherent response can be mounted. At that time the situation may stabilise and the character of the conflict will change.

If the Imperium can avoid being forced to the negotiating table in the first months of the war, the outcome is in doubt. It is impossible to say which side will have the advantage once Imperial reinforcements arrive. It may be that the outcome of the war depends upon many small factors – a band of Travellers here, a warship crew there. What is certain is that the Travellers stand atop one of the fulcrums of history. Will they rise to the challenge? Will they flee the war zone? Will they pursue their own goals against the backdrop of the Fifth Frontier War? Only they can decide.

Long-time *Traveller* players may think they know the outcome of this conflict but everything can change. It may be useful to think of previous publications covering the Fifth Frontier War as being simulations or expectations of how it will play out. The Fifth Frontier War series from Mongoose Publishing may take a different course, and will definitely allow Travellers to have a hand in deciding the outcome.

INDEX

60mm Bombardment Cluster 109
60mm RAM Grenade Launcher 109
60mm Rocket-Propelled Grenade 109
100mm Anti-armour Missile 110

Aboard a Denisov 50
Abyss Rift 121
A Conversation with Arlent Streen 75
A Deck 61
Aftermath 68
Argacan Multipurpose Vessel 121
Ambush at Fulacin 55
Argacan Multipurpose Vessel 114
Arriving at Jae Tellona 43
Arriving at Rhylanor 38
Arriving on Dinom 73
Assisting Streen 78
AutoBridge 20
AutoEngineer 20
AutoGunner 21
AutoPurser 21
A Zhodani Conspiracy 54

Battle Phase 89
B Deck 63
Bodyguard 66
Borressen's Questions to the Travellers 51

C Deck 63
City Rioters 77
Chief Executive Arlent Streen 81
Crewmembers 66

D Deck 65
Denisov Battlecruiser 121
Dinom Security Personnel 78
Down to Kikhimaa City 38

Engaging the ATVs 79
Escape from Arden 102
Escape from Napan 81
Escape Grenades 108
Expert Witness 48

Federation of Arden 121
First Impressions 40
Fortress Rhylanor 122

General Procurement LIC 123
General Products 34
Governmental Procurement 11

Imperial Naval Intelligence 33
Improved Kinunir Patrol Destroyer 117
Ine Givar 123
Investigating General Products 45
Investigating the General Products Ship 74
Involving the Travellers 2

Jeffe Khalid 97
Joachim Krystalfuchs 8

Kapiten im Raum Svan Borressen 52
Kinunir Vanguard Cruiser 124

MagnetoDynamics 53,124
Making Use of Agendas 6
Maninra Heiss 10
Mining Laser 110
Motivations, Fake 5
Motivations, Freelance Expert 4
Motivations, Notable Figure 5
Motivations, Plant 6
Motivations, RVSC Employee 3
Naval Base and Shipyards, Rhylanor 36

INDEX

Open Rebellion	76
Other Crew	8
Other Patrons	34
Pequan	96
Reidd-Valaasii starship Corporation	125
Phlume	95
Q Deck	59
Rangent	96
Rebels	79
Refereeing the Endgame	93
Rhylanor Freight Services LIC	125
RVSC	33
Sales Pitch	46
Sensor Glitch	70
ShortHop Shipping LIC	125
Silent Observer	125
Sir Ba-abtab Atwa	47
Sir Hamex Calston	67, 75
Small Arms	107
Society on Rhylanor	35
Stannen Vaanaii	9
Starship Sales Reps	7
Stranded On Arden?	102
The Battle of Medianne	87
The Fate of Dinom	93
The Intelligence Package	13
The Malishu Situation	57
The Monorail Rescue	83
The Reidd-Valaasii Starship Corporation	11
The Rhylanor Institute of Technology	37
The Starport, Rhylanor	36
The Travellers at Medianne	89
The Truth About the Mission	12
The Zueng Conundrum	49
Traveller Motivations	11
Trial of the Zueng	50
Trials Without Tribulations	40
Type R2A4	15
Using Autocrew	21
Zhodani Agents	66

TRAVELLER

WHISPERS ON THE ABYSS

A complete mini-campaign for *Traveller*, setting the stage for great events to come!

The Travellers are offered a lucrative contract to showcase a prototype starship to potential clients along the Spinward Main. Their route takes them around the periphery of the Abyss Rift, a region with a sinister reputation for starship disappearances and mysterious events.

They soon discover they are not the only players in the game. An Imperial megacorporation is pushing its own designs and playing hard for big contracts. As if competing with General Products was not enough, there is sabotage and revolt on the worlds of the Spinward Main. A simple promotional cruise becomes a fight for survival, and all the while there are whispers of something big happening on the fringes of the Abyss.

MONGOOSE PUBLISHING

STUDIO PUBLISHING

MGP 40114

ISBN 978-1-916675-13-1

US $49.99

Produced under license by Studio 2 Publishing, Inc. The Studio 2 logo is a trademark of Studio 2 Publishing, Inc. Copyright 2024. All rights reserved.